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DRAGON

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Editorial:
Romancing the Stone Giant

By Christopher Perkins

A couple Gen Cons ago, Ed Greenwood asked me whether we (by which I mean the royal "we") had plans to do anything with Cormyr, the kingdom in the heart of Faerûn. He then pitched an idea for a series of Forgotten Realms® articles based on a Cormyr treatment that freelance writer Brian Cortijo had worked up in his spare time.

Last year around this time, it dawned on me that I'd put Ed's summertime proposal completely out of my mind. On a rainy December day in Seattle, I was brainstorming themes for the magazines, and two of the words that appeared on my list were "romance" and "royalty." Neither of these ideas sounded strong enough to carry a whole month, but they sure sounded great together.

Once I warmed to the idea of doing a "romance & royalty" theme, Ed's Cormyr proposal popped back into my mind. I contacted Brian Cortijo and asked if he could write an article called "Cormyr Royale," detailing the Cormyrean court. To do it justice, we needed to present not only the current court circa 1479 DR but also the court circa 1379 DR, before the Spellplague. That way, FR fans who'd fallen in love with one court or the other wouldn't feel left out, and we could get a sense of the changes between the popular reign of the Steel Regent, Alusair Obarskyr, and the current reign of King Foril Obarskyr.

Cormyr is the romantic ideal of a medieval fantasy campaign, a realm of chivalrous knights and legendary wizards, beautiful castles and idyllic landscapes, with tyranny and monsters lurking just beyond its mountains and within the darkest depths of its forests.

When he submitted his initial outline for "Cormyr Royale," Brian also pitched a couple buttressing articles—one describing the military ranks and noble titles of Cormyr, and another detailing the royal swords of Cormyr. These short pieces coupled with a Backdrop article on the Cormyrean capital of Suzail (by Eric Menge) and a character themes article detailing the Purple Dragon Knights and War Wizards of Cormyr (by Dan Anderson) is what Ed Greenwood and other Cormyr aficionados might call "a good start."

The "romance" part of this month's theme is somewhat underplayed, but I hope you find the "D&D Love Stories" article (by Jeff LaSala) rich with ideas.

But what, you might ask, does all this have to do with stone giants? Well . . .

Not everything we publish is tied to an overarching theme, but "Warrens of the Stone Giant Thane" (written by yours truly) is actually the offspring of a romance and thus thematically relevant after all.

Years ago, I had fallen in love with a collection of three adventurers written by Gary Gygax called *Against the Giants*. Perhaps you've heard of it. I've always had a soft spot for stone giants, but they don't get much love in Gary's adventure. In the original *Monster Manual*, they were neutral; in 4E, they're unaligned. In other words, they're not "easy villains" like their more brutal and wicked cousins, the hill giants, frost giants, and fire giants.

Based on their alignment, one might imagine stone giants as reclusive, industrious cave dwellers who prefer to be left alone. Finding a way to make them a threat was a challenge I'd carved out for myself when I set out to adapt *Against the Giants* for 4th Edition. Ultimately I decided to give my stone giants all the faults and foibles of human beings, and let the evil rise naturally from that.

As I mentioned in a recent Design & Development column, "Warrens of the Stone Giant Thane" fills the level rift between the hill giant adventure in *Dungeon* 197 and the frost giant adventure in *Dungeon* 199. But more importantly, it afforded me the chance to indulge my love of Gygaxian adventure design and lose myself in a sprawling, monster-infested dungeon for a couple weeks . . . what stone giants might call a "fling."

It's so easy to fall in love with D&D. Forget about the warts, the extra heads, the facelifts; she's always been a great beauty, all charm and elegance. My romance with the game has lasted for thirty-four years, and it's through the magazines that I express that love, even though they're a royal pain in the ass sometimes. But then, you can't have love without pain, can you?

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D&D Love Stories

By Jeff LaSala

Illustration by Beth Trott

The vampire's final shriek echoed through the dark space. Condign tried to savor the sound, to relish the anguish his foe had suffered in the final moments of its unlife. When the scream faded, he fixed his golden eyes on the single beam of pale sunlight that pierced the stony ceiling and barely lit the cavern. The tiefling and his allies had cleverly maneuvered the day-fearing undead into its burning embrace. The shaft of light also reminded him of the world that awaited them outside. He tried to smile, but felt nothing.

"Condign?"

The warrior stood motionless as his companions rushed around him, eager to loot the vampire's remains or sort through the bones and other debris that littered

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the floor. This expedition hadn't been cheap, and they could use any treasures they could find.

"Condign, let's go," Kalarian called. The human sorcerer sounded impatient. "We need to rest somewhere and can't wait around here. That thing's wretched spawn may still be lurking about."

But the tiefling didn't budge. Instead, he looked down at the broadsword in his hand, which still gleamed with the vampire's blood. With his other hand he grasped the braid of auburn hair that was always tied at his belt. He closed his eyes and thought of her again. The memories were old now, but no less vivid. He could still remember her teasing laughter, could still imagine the flick of her tail, the way her horns would dip to one side when she was in a mischievous mood. And her eyes . . . purest silver. Silver to his gold.

Eyes of argent fire, so full of life, passion, and good humor.

"I'd like to wait for them, Kal," Condign answered softly.

When his wife's killer was chained and screaming in the depths of the Abyss, then he would rest.

When you sit down to play Dungeons & Dragons®, you're probably thinking about the character you've created, the monsters you'll fight, or the treasures you'll win. You're probably not thinking about how love and romance could factor into your game—or perhaps you are. There are many kinds of players, and some enjoy deep characterization and high adventure over clobbering monsters and taking their treasure. Anyone who's ever fallen in love knows there are few stronger emotional motivators.

This article is intended to give you a few ideas on using love as a plot device or driving force in your game, either for your character or for the movers and shakers of the setting. There is no end to compelling love stories in fantasy fiction that you can draw inspiration from, and more can be found in D&D® novels old and new. My advice is to steal their ideas outright or reconfigure them to suit your own style.

What's Love Got to Do With It?

First and foremost, love in the D&D world doesn't have to be sappy. This is a realm of magical fire and ringing steel, of physical transformations and powerful rituals. Love could be the catalyst for a paladin's quest, a rogue's heist, or a wizard's research. A villain might be motivated by unrequited love or a personal betrayal. And why not? Kings have been slain for less. Monsters and villains can have motivations and goals, and their interest in the heroes might extend beyond "food that walks" to something more personal. Which is more fun to play—having the heroes chase down a bog hag because a local lord is hiring them to do it, or having them chase her down because she impersonated the eladrin warrior's lover during the previous adventure and locked up the real one in an oubliette somewhere in the Feydark?

Love stories can be used in small and intimate ways, or as epic ordeals. Love might be the reason the mayor's son was kidnapped by bandits in a seemingly straightforward 1st-level adventure. Perhaps the bandit queen is madly in love with him and cannot abide his marrying that sanctimonious town cleric. When the heroes confront the outlaws and discover the relationship they share, do they enforce the law, or do they let love conquer (especially if the mayor's son doesn't mind the queen's attention)?

Likewise, love might be the underlying goal of the campaign's primary villain, a powerful sorceress who would murder half the world to win the affections of a death god. She might seek lichdom to become his exarch and bride, and her actions over the course of the campaign—all those temple desecrations, the unending bone golem attacks, that zombie plague—might stem from this deathless passion.

Of course, there are all kinds of love stories. The categories below are starting points, and they naturally overlap with each other. Plot hooks are included for each category, which you can use for encounters, adventures, entire campaigns, or to spark your own ideas.

Courtly Love

"This is true love. You think this happens every day?"
—The Princess Bride

Courtly love invokes the classic themes of chivalry, royalty, intrigue, and storybook endings—whether they're happily ever after or desperately tragic. In *The Princess Bride*, "true love" is an idyllic force that the hero fights, suffers, and (mostly) dies for. It earns him unexpected allies of noble spirit and pits him against the ambitions of an evil prince. Bards, epic poems, and music are good fodder for this sort of storybook love.

Arthurian legends are also ripe with gallantry and heroic deeds to inspire. They don't all end well, but not for lack of drama. Arthur is made king by a sword, then marries Guinevere, who in turn falls in love with

Lancelot, but not before—in more contemporary versions—he sires a child with his half-sister, Morgan le Fay. Messy love triangles aren't for everyone, but lovelorn knights riding about in shining armor can be!

Heroes of the Fallen Lands™ introduces the knight as a subclass of the fighter, but the concept of a knight as a chivalrous crusader can be applied to any class, especially a martial or divine class such as the warlord or the paladin. A knight is a professional soldier who serves a feudal lord or swears loyalty to a particular realm. Traditionally, knights follow a strict code of law, such as chivalry, which includes a profound respect for women. Moreover, in D&D, the blade swings both ways: Men aren't the only ones donning armor and riding about with blades.

Plot Hooks

For Love or Deity: One of the heroes, a paladin of the Raven Queen, serves two mistresses, her god and her empress. Normally, she maintains an equilibrium between the two, but her loyalties become conflicted with a new problem: The man she loves is the empress's exiled son, whose bitterness has driven him to a foreign land where he is falling under the influence of a cult of Orcus, Demon Prince of the Undead (and enemy of the Raven Queen). The paladin's conflict of interest forms a series of adventures as she tries to save her lover before avengers of the Raven Queen—or his mother's assassins—reach him.

Devil in Disguise: A young knight wishes to honor the king's daughter and thereby prove his love for her, but the king won't allow them to see one another unless the knight brings back the head of the bloodfire harpy that has been terrorizing his roads. And the king certainly won't entertain the idea of the two getting married until the earthquake dragon destroying his mining operations is slain. When it's finally revealed that the king is a cambion in regal guise and that the mines in question lead to a portal to the Nine Hells, the knight's devotion to the king's daughter is put to the test. Was the king always a fiend, or is the real king dead? And is the princess an innocent, or is she party to an impending diabolic invasion?

Queen's Gambit: A young nobleman and bard is tasked by a wealthy merchant to track down and kill the nefarious pirate queen who has been troubling the local trade routes. He sets off on a swashbuckling voyage with his friends and retainers through treacherous, monster-haunted waters, but when they finally find her, they discover that she's not a pirate, not a queen, and is, in fact the merchant's own wayward daughter on the run. She's also an astonishing beauty who has earned the wrath of a sahuagin prince and has been demonized by her father and his merchant cohorts. Why? Because the sahuagin has agreed to discuss the prospect of trade with the merchants in exchange for her death, and the merchant is trying to ensure that his daughter's death won't reflect badly upon him. Do the heroes side with her against her enemies—a powerful cabal of rich merchants, their goons, and a principality's worth of sea devils? She's no shrinking violet—she can curse and spit with the best of real pirates—but she needs help, and true valor can win her heart.

Beauty and the Bestiary

"I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me."

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

In D&D, a damsel in distress might be masquerading as a monster—perhaps she truly is a vindictive dryad punishing woodland trespassers, a hag that despises mortal beauty, or a rakshasa with an appetite for the lovelorn. Monsters don't always have to be combat opponents. They can fall in love, too, and sometimes the feeling is mutual. Any number of shapechangers can fit the bill, such as doppelgangers, lamias, and lycanthropes, to name a few.

When not chomping on people, lycanthropes can still spend a large portion of their existence as regular humanoids. They might be predators predisposed toward evil, but they're also intelligent and have personalities and desires of their own. Not every werewolf has to be a senseless killer; if one spends some time among the heroes disguised as a freelance tracker, that might convince him there's more to life than fresh meat.

Any intelligent monster can conceivably dabble in love, and with a dash of magic, any monster could take a humanoid form to further its romance with a comely adventurer. In *Dragons of Winter Night*, the elf lord Gilthanas lost his heart to the exotic Kagonesti elf Silvara. Their love was perfect, even amid the chaos of the War of the Lance, until she was forced to reveal her true nature as an ancient silver dragon. Horrified, Gilthanas rejected her and regretted his mistake. Eventually, his love for her proved stronger than his common sense, and he set out on a tragic quest to find her again.

Plot Hooks

Were's the Truth: A mysterious and comely woman arrives in town at dusk one day, strong of arm, sharp of tongue, and short of temper. She offers her services as a mercenary in exchange for room and board and, curiously, the chance to study at the town's temple of Ioun. One of the heroes also appears to have caught her eye, and her guarded demeanor quickly gives way to flirtation. But when it's revealed that she is a wereboar, after she transforms into a brutish monster in front of the townsfolk, they panic and form a lynch mob. She implores the hero and his friends for help. If the mob goes unchecked, townsfolk die, and the love interest might be killed as well. But is that the best outcome? Perhaps she's on the run from her cruel family, convinced she can find a way

to remove the curse of lycanthropy in her blood . . . and getting support from the one person she can trust might be her only chance. Or perhaps she's only a wicked she-boar looking for a mate.

Undying Adoration: A flesh golem has been seen lurking about a local cemetery, robbing graves but attacking only to protect itself. When the heroes investigate and confront the monster, it speaks with unexpected intelligence and asks them to follow it. The golem leads the heroes to a tower outside town, where an elderly, dying sorceress pleads with them for help. She explains that her husband, who recently died from the same incurable affliction that's claiming her, inhabits the body of the golem. Now she is racing against time to complete the construction of a second golem, for her spirit to occupy. If she is to succeed and the two are to live on together, she needs one final (and rare) reagent for the necessary ritual. Only the heroes have the ability to find it in time.

Love Sphinx: During one of their adventures, the heroes solve a riddle posed by a sphinx. The sphinx lets them pass, but then she follows them, infatuated by the adventurer who came up with the answer. She is disconsolate and weary of her life as an immortal guardian (perhaps her mate was slain long ago). The sphinx aids the heroes, surreptitiously at first, then later overtly. She is obsessed with the object of her affections and refuses to leave his side. She speaks of finding a way to permanently assume a humanoid shape, so that she can stay with him. The hero must decide if an immortal lover of angelic origin, whose worldview is decidedly enigmatic, is what he wants. Perhaps, with help, she can be transformed into a deva. Or he might need to convince her that having a place in the universe as a sphinx is her proper, and noble, fate.

Eternally Yours: An arrogant djinn woos one of the heroes (perhaps a genasi) when she frees him from an ancient amphora. The djinn lavishes gifts upon the character and hopes to make her his lifelong companion. But his attentions—welcome or not—make the party the target of an efreet who hates this particular djinn and anyone who shares her company.

BE A LOVER AND A FIGHTER!

If you're a player, there are two fundamental ways for you to incorporate a love story into the game. The first way is to use it as flavor in your character's background, which serves as a catalyst for his or her actions during gameplay. The other requires the cooperation of the DM.

As Backstory: Before becoming an adventurer, your character was betrothed or married. He was forced to leave his betrothed or spouse behind. His time abroad as an adventurer is the ultimate test of loyalty and devotion. Is his significant other at home waiting faithfully, as Penelope waited for Odysseus? Will he someday return to deal with trouble at home? (Another adventure hook to give your DM!) Or perhaps your character isn't married yet—merely lovelorn, hoping to win his heart's desire by returning with gold and glory. In *The Lord of the Rings*, nothing short of claiming the throne of Gondor would win Aragorn the hand of Arwen Undómiel. He might have had her heart and her willingness to share a mortal life together, but this particular ranger had to see the One Ring destroyed and the Dark Lord defeated if he was to live happily ever after. Likewise, the prize might lie before you all along, but achieving it remains one of your campaign's long-term goals. You might need to acquire an astral diamond, slay an epic villain, or stop a coming apocalypse to get the girl. Or go with the *Clash of the Titans* scenario: Maybe your significant other has been chosen as a sacrifice to the tarrasque in hopes of placating the creature when it wakes—and you've got one year to muster enough power to stop it when it does. What could be more romantic?

Clear and Present Danger: Your character has a relationship with another character or an active NPC in the game. The NPC might be a patron, a hireling, or even a villain. Given your lifestyle as an adventurer, this relationship is likely to be complex. If she's an ally, she might call on you and your friends for aid (and you know you can't turn her down), and if she's an enemy, she might occasionally try to kill your friends. (Awkward!) In an Eberron game I run, an NPC necromancer "frenemy" has an interesting relationship with the party's warlock. In return for her affections, he has promised to let her make the killing stroke that ends his life someday. If an enemy ever kills him, that act would be a betrayal of her trust. And the jury's still out on whether the other party members won't kill her first. As they say, it's complicated.

Star-Crossed Lovers

"Always together, eternally apart."

—Ladyhawke

The term "star-crossed," coined by Shakespeare, principally refers to lovers who are—figuratively, at least—thwarted by cosmic forces or maligning stars. Romeo and Juliet are the poster children for this fate, but there are plenty more who've cropped up in literature and film, from Tristan and Isolde to Anakin and Padmé. While worldly circumstances keep the lovers apart, the idea is made more romantic by suggesting

that behind it all, the universe might be conspiring to stop them.

In the D&D world, this can be the literal situation. The cosmos is filled with powerful and active agencies—gods, exarchs, devils, angels, and any number of organizations with agendas of their own. They might orchestrate events to make something happen, or to prevent something from happening. There's no reason why arcane or divine forces or planar alignment can't factor into your game. Or maybe the cause is just a vengeful curse made by a powerful mortal. In *Ladyhawke*, Captain Navarre and Isabeau were cursed by the jealous Bishop of Aquila when he made a bargain with hell. By day, Isabeau is a hawk; by night, Navarre is a wolf. "Poor dumb creatures, with no memory of the half-life of their human existence, never touching in the flesh. Only the anguish of a split second at sunrise and sunset, when they can almost touch . . . but not."

Plot Hooks

Why Us?: The Far Realm is seemingly intruding on a character's romance by sending a steady supply of aberrant beasts to attack the character and his or her paramour. Whenever the lovers meet, gibbering creatures of slime and madness are drawn inexorably to them. When the two spend time apart, the attacks abate. Why has their love become a magnet for abominations? An astrologer or a star pact warlock might be able to shed light on the reason for their misfortune, but the lovers need to find a treacherously situated orrery or an arcane observatory to uncover the deeper truth.

The Cursed Cleric: A vistani quits his tribe when he falls in love with a cleric of Erathis, the god of civilization. But when his tribe's elder, a vengeful crone who does not accept his decision, levies a curse upon the woman, it threatens more than their relationship. The curse might be lycanthropy, the personal attention of demons, or a scathing wanderlust that keeps her from remaining in one place for more than an hour at a time lest she become afflicted with soul rot (*Manual of the Planes*). Only the elder can remove the curse, but placating her requires a great sacrifice on the part of the two lovers.

Prophecy of Doom: A lovers' tryst sets into motion a long-forgotten prophecy that sends angels, archons, and githyanki to the mortal world to influence its outcome. There is one way to thwart the prophecy, but it requires the lovers to trigger a countering event. Unfortunately for them, the place where this event must occur is Vecna's hidden tower in the heart of Pandemonium.

Forbidden Love

"I am mortal. You are elfkind. It was a dream . . . nothing more . . ."

—The Two Towers

Often the most compelling love stories are those that defy racial or cultural barriers. In D&D, the possibilities are myriad. Problems stemming from clashing races, alignments, faiths, and social castes are just the beginning. Consider the inherent difficulties in a romance between elf and drow, mortal and immortal, or commoner and noble. You have only to pick two (or more) qualities or descriptors that don't normally mix well, throw in a dose of irrevocable love, and see what happens.

In the Dragonlance® novels, Riverwind is a plainsman and a poor man's son who dares to love the daughter of the chieftain of his tribe. He isn't good enough in the eyes of his kinsmen, so he is given an impossible task to win her hand: bring back evidence of the heathen gods. He journeys through pain and darkness to a place "where death flew on black wings" and returns triumphant. In the *Legends* trilogy, a mysterious romance forms between the powerful Raistlin Majere, an evil wizard of the Black Robes, and Crysania, virtuous cleric of Paladine. Raistlin strives to attain godhood, while she, tragically blinded by her love, is devoted to turning him from evil.

In Elaine Cunningham's Forgotten Realms® novels, Danilo Thann is a human of Waterdhavian nobility who plays a foppish bard to disguise his clandestine activities with the Harpers. Over the course of the saga, he falls in love with his comrade-in-arms, Arilyn Moonblade, a half-elf warrior. This is problematic from both sides of the racial divide. To complicate matters, Danilo's family has a trace of elven ancestry—a dirty secret, as far as his snobbish, elf-hating mother is concerned—and Arilyn has ties to Evermeet's royalty. While their romance isn't orthodox, their passion is real. Where he embodies the elven proclivity for laughter and song, she personifies the grace, focus, and swordplay of her heritage.

Consider ways of using forbidden love in your game by mixing race, gender, or circumstance. For love to be forbidden, remember it also means that someone's got a problem with the relationship and stands as an obstacle.

Plot Hooks

Not in My House: One of the ruling merchants of Amn, a country known for its distrust of arcane magic, forbids his son or daughter (an NPC) from associating with a spellscarred adventurer (one of the characters). If the character doesn't end the romance soon, some of the merchant's considerable gold will be spent on Zhentarim assassins.

Bad Blood: One of the heroes, a dragonmarked heir of a noble house, falls in love with the heir of another house; it is feared that intermarriage between dragonmarked houses produces aberrant dragonmarks among the offspring. If the lovers insist on going through with the union, they risk excoriation or worse.

Beneath Her Station: A templar of one of the sorcerer-kings of Athas becomes obsessed with a particularly audacious gladiator (one of the heroes). The

templar is normally cruel and ambitious, but when she arranges for the hero's freedom, does he return her affections? She risks exile or execution for what she has done, but her passion flies in the face of her evil nature.

Old Times' Sake: After many years, a cleric of Bahamut is reunited with a man she knew and loved in her youth. Their feelings for one another are rekindled. However, he's now a cleric of Bane, and their respective clergies might have something to say about a budding romance.

In Love and War

"All those widows. I still hear them screaming. Their husbands died because I'm here."

–Troy

A compelling love story impacts more than the two principals. Sometimes love is the center of a larger conflict, or the spark that set that conflict afire. The Trojan War of Greek mythology is a prime example of this, but war in D&D can be more sensational, raging between kingdoms or across the planes. Of course, it depends on who's smitten with whom. A young fighter from a no-name little hamlet might start a few brawls if he is spurned by a woman, but a lovelorn emperor, archmage, or exarch can affect the fates of millions.

Wars fueled by passion can come from anywhere. The flight of a prominent drow priestess might bring the wrath of her house or her entire city to the surface world when it is discovered that she has sworn her life to Corellon, god of magic and the creator of all elvenkind. What if the bastard half-orc son of an orc king—who also is a one-eyed shaman of Gruumsh—was discovered consorting with a female elf from a neighboring forest? Orcs need few excuses for war as it is.

Plot Hooks

Center of Attention: Your character's is the face that launches a thousand astral ships. You are so charismatic that nobles, kings, or immortals want to possess you. Perhaps you have a spark of the divine in you, or you were blessed by Sehanine with otherwordly beauty for an unknown reason. Angels, archons, and mortal servants clash in the Astral Sea, while githyanki pirates pick off the wounded, as you become the object of a feud that spirals out of control. Some of the war's instigators might truly adore you, and others desire you as a collector might a priceless work of art. Of course, you can't give in and trade your freedom for peace, but is there another way to quell the violence? And what if you *do* love one of the combatants?

Deal Breaker: A corruption devil offers the kingdom's most celebrated general her heart's desire—a handsome eladrin lord she met when she was an adventurer—in exchange for "a few simple conquests." In defiance of her king, the general's aggressions abroad instigate a bloody civil war. The eladrin is brought to her in chains, beaten by devils and subjugated to her will. He is miserable, and the land is soaked with innocent blood. What does the general do now? What if her heart's desire was one of the characters?

Whatever You Say, Dear: A succubus masquerades as a winsome female dwarf, whose wiles convince a lonely dwarf king to raid the benevolent gnome communities at his border. Not because he wants to or needs their wealth, but to please his lady love.

Undying Love

"There are those among the living who depend upon you. I know, because all that you have was once mine. I cast it away, choosing to live in darkness instead of light. Will you follow me? Will you throw all you have aside for one who chose, long ago, to walk the paths of night?"

–Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Test of the Twins*

Let's face it—sometimes it's more interesting when love carries beyond the grave. The D&D world might be filled with slavering ghouls and rotting zombies, but there are plenty of undead that might want more than flesh and blood from the living—ghosts, vampires, mummies, and liches are a few of the obvious fun and intelligent undead with potentially nuanced interests.

In the novel *I, Strahd*, the legendary Count Strahd Von Zarovich makes a pact with Death and murders his own brother to win the woman he loves. The Dark Powers "reward" him with inhuman strength, immortality, and a lust for blood, but Tatyana recoils from him, flees, then throws herself from the cliffs of Castle Ravenloft. For all his newfound power, Strahd is a cursed vampire lord, destined to find and then lose his heart's desire as she dies and is reborn again and again throughout the ages. Now that's romance!

In the Dragonlance saga, the infamous Lord Soth became a death knight when his wife cursed him for his doubt, jealousy, and refusal to save her and their infant son. Even in undeath centuries later, he desires the spirit of the Dragon Highlord Kitiara, and will accept her living or dead.

Plot Hooks **Plea from Beyond:** An eladrin wizard (perhaps the father of one of the heroes) turns traitor to his own city, betraying its greatest secrets to an alliance of fomorians. After he is tried for his crime and executed at the hand of his brokenhearted wife, he returns as a fey lingerer. Embittered and unquestionably evil, he seeks redemption in the eyes of his wife, hoping to convince her that he did what he did for her sake. With which parent does the hero side?

My Gift to You: One of the heroes meets a woman of ravishing beauty who wishes to give up her life as a nursemaid for one of adventure and glory. In truth, she is a penanggalan, vanishing mysteriously each night to hunt the living, but her affection for the adventurer is genuine. Out of love for him, she does

not personally harm the other heroes in the party, but she does intend to lead her new paramour into undeath with her; she knows of a vampire lord who can perform the Dark Gift of the Undying ritual. If the hero's allies are injured in the process, well, then that's less contention for her.

Dark Demise: The love interest of one of the heroes is killed. The mysterious nature of his death, however, prevents the Raise Dead ritual from working—for whatever reason, the subject's soul is not "free and willing to return to life." But all is not lost. A shadar-kai mystic approaches the characters and tells them that the man's spirit can be recovered and returned to life. He gives them a strange map and brings them to a place where the borders between the mortal world and the Shadowfell are thin. In the manner of Orpheus from Greek mythology, now they must venture deep into the underworld of the planes and bargain for a lost soul.

FOR DMS

If one of your players wants to create a love story for his or her character—whether off-screen or part of the everyday adventuring—run with it, if you're willing. It might even be that two player characters share a bond that goes beyond friendship; this situation is guaranteed to bring about unique roleplaying challenges, since all manner of monsters try to beguile or destroy them throughout their careers.

Or it might be a relationship between an adventurer and one of your NPCs. If so, use it. The responsibility is on you to keep the game interesting, but because you're the DM, you can use it as a story device, too. If the adventurer has a girlfriend, don't kidnap her over and over again so that she has to be rescued. That becomes tiresome for everyone. You don't want her to be a hanger-on that everyone else puts up with; you want her to be a fun and engaging part of the game. Let her personality and her status bring in new plot hooks and story rewards.

Above all, don't force a romance onto your players. Introduce a potential love interest into the story and see how they react, or run the idea by your players directly. If it's not what they're interested in roleplaying and you railroad them into it, it might make them uncomfortable; at worst, it'll make the game weird.

Unrequited Love

"It was worse than any sword thrust, colder and more cruel than a blast of winter sleet upon naked skin. I could have cried aloud from the pain she so innocently gave me ."

—P.N. Elrod, *I, Strahd*

Not all love is reciprocated, especially in stories of tragedy or revenge. At best in such cases, there is pain and sorrow; at worst, anger and resentment. If one of the heroes rejects someone's amorous advances, he or she might invite the wrath of a monstrous king, a jealous fey lord, or a disfigured priest of Vecna. Or, to reverse it, perhaps one of the heroes desires someone he or she cannot have. This desire can provide the hero's motivation throughout the campaign, or it could be a fleeting concern that is eventually laid to rest. It need not be active; it could be a quiet anguish that underlies his or her actions. Some of the most enduring heroes are the tragic ones.

In *Ladyhawke*, when it becomes clear that the evil bishop cannot have the woman he wants, he cries out, "Then no man shall!" and tries to stab her in the back with a bladed staff. There's a fine line between love and obsession and what they can drive someone to doing. What about Glasya, Princess of Hell and daughter of the dread Asmodeus? How would she react, during your game's epic tier, if she desired one of the party's more virtuous heroes and met with resistance? Glasya would exemplify a woman scorned; if she can't have him . . .

The Book of Lost Things, a novel by John Connolly, includes the story of a knight named Roland who quests to save a man named Raphael. Roland knows that Raphael does not share his feelings—and in fact his friend is trying to save a woman by journeying into peril—but he sets out just the same, out of loyalty and love. It's tragic and bittersweet, but more important, it's memorable.

Plot Hooks

Love Me or Else: A tiefling warlord lays siege to a wizard's fortress with an army of monstrous allies, intent on slaying everyone under its protection . . . unless the wizard's apprentice (one of the heroes), whom she has loved since she was a child, accepts her as a partner. Her obsession is hellish in its power but childish in its reasoning. Confronting her might be the only option, but might also mean a tragic fight.

Inside Job: A spirit devourer uses its *trap spirit* power on the lover of one of the heroes, then flees with that individual trapped in it. The devourer is acting under the orders of a jealous necromancer who refused to countenance a rival. The hero and his or her allies have to hunt down the devourer and tangle with its undead lackeys if the lover is to be saved. Even if the heroes are successful in this, is the lover still the same? What does a stint inside a devourer do to one's relationships?

The Pull of Shadow: After a near-death experience (or an actual death-and-Raise-Dead experience), one of the heroes has attracted the interest of something from the Shadowfell—something or someone who glimpsed the hero's departing spirit in the realm of the dead. Whatever it is, it wants him or her back.

Dark ones begin to appear and "politely request" that he or she returns to the Shadowfell—in spirit or physical form, it doesn't matter. The more the hero resists, the more aggressive the emissaries become, to the point where they begin to attack the party. In time, a banderhobb shows up and attempts to forcibly abduct the hero. What power of shadow so desires his or her company?

Faerie Tales

"Your lovely form . . . your gliding movements, and your eloquent eyes. With these you can easily enchant a human heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Stick out your little tongue and I shall cut it off. I'll have my price, and you shall have the potent draught."

—Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid*

The Feywild, the realm of Faerie, offers a new world of possibilities. It's not all pixie dust and dancing fauns out there. Being a fantastical reflection of the mortal world, the Feywild is vast, beautiful, and terrible. It's populated with capricious creatures as powerful and wrathful as noble eladrins, as alluring as nymphs, and as hideously evil as fomorians. All you need is for one of the Feywild's more dangerous denizens to fancy one of the heroes, and you've got a potential love story—or a big problem. And as for pixie dust, don't dismiss that either: The "dust of broken hearts," which came from the faeries, worked wonders in the film *Willow*, helping the swordsman Madmartigan win the girl, who in turned helped the good guys win the day.

As a starting point, take any Brothers Grimm classic with a love story in it and you can make a cool D&D adventure out of it.

Plot Hooks

"Rapunzel": A human foundling was taken in by an eladrin wizard from the Feywild city of Mithrendain. Enamored by his lovely protégé, he has locked her in a briar-wrapped tower outside the city, where she will languish and grow old if not rescued. When the adventurers happen upon the tower during their adventures, she places her hopes and her heart on one of the heroes and asks him for liberation. Instead of long golden hair to grant him access, she can command thorns and briars to part, allowing a visitor to enter the spell- and monster-guarded tower—though she cannot leave under her own power. But perhaps this Rapunzel isn't what she appears, after all. Perhaps the wizard, in keeping her there, is secreting away a great evil under lock and key.

"Little Briar Rose" or "Snow White": One of the heroes (possibly a character whose player is on hiatus) is the victim, rendered comatose by the spell of a jealous, lovelorn fomorian witch. The hero's allies are forced to seek another cure when rituals fail to revive him. Seers and diviners eventually direct the party to the Feywild, where a reclusive winter nymph dwells in exile on the edge of a frozen forest. Only her kiss can awaken the slumbering hero, but she becomes enamored of one of the others and demands from him an oath of love and fidelity. This might be fine, at first—she's quite a looker!—but this nymph has a chilling agenda that sends the whole party on to greater peril.

"The Frog Prince": A loathsome, slime-covered slaad approaches the heroes, begging for help, and this gives them pause. What kind of slaad is as restrained as this? When its chaotic mutterings subside, it speaks quietly to one of the heroes—perhaps the shy sorceress or the bookish wizard of the party—whom it trusts and soon grows to love. It tells her in its agonized, plaintive voice that it is really an elf ranger cursed by a witch. And it might be. There was no more handsome a warrior in the forest kingdom where he came from, and he might be royalty there. The problem is that it takes more than a kiss from a woman to break the enchantment that binds him in horrid elemental flesh. And the witch in question, who might be a night hag, has been scrying on him, taking a keen interest in those who dare to help the elf who spurned her.

Love and the Divine

"Sit with me this night and talk. I have much to tell you . . . and even gods grow lonely."

—Ed Greenwood, *Elminster, the Making of a Mage*

Literature and mythology are chock full of stories in which the gods mingle with mortals, have affairs, and produce offspring—some mortal, some a fusion of mortal and divine, and some monsters. They can fall in love with mortals, favor them with divine gifts, or curse them for their hubris or rejection. The Greek myths are particularly famous for their petty and jealous gods, and they're rich with fantastical ideas to mine.

Depending on your campaign setting or pantheon, the gods might be cosmic rulers of questionable existence (as in Eberron) or true deities active in the world's affairs (as in Faerûn). Either way, there's plenty of opportunity to incorporate love and the divine. Whether it is romantic love for a god or devotion to a god of love, deities can be a singular force for romance and adventure.

In the core world pantheon, Sehanine is the goddess of trickery, illusions, and also of clandestine love. She is the veil of darkness that conceals lovers from prying eyes, and her servants are more likely than any to follow their hearts and defend others from intolerance and judgment. In Faerûn, heartwarders are gallant servants of Sune who "seek to protect love wherever it exists and set right any wrongs that interfere with love's intended course" (*Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*), who oppose tyranny and cruelty and play matchmaker along the way. In Eberron, Boldrei is the lord of Hall and Hearth, the goddess of community and marriage; adventurers who quest in her name oppose that which destroys love and family.

In Ed Greenwood's Forgotten Realms novels, the famous wizard Elminster is more than a Chosen of Mystra, goddess of magic. He embodies the kindness, independence, tolerance, and good humor that the goddess can seldom find in mortals. In Elminster's youth, she takes notice of him, tests him, and ultimately falls in love with him. In turn, he needs her love and power to inspire his efforts across the hard centuries—being a Chosen is not an easy life. Theirs is a unique, complex relationship that evolves not only from his mortal existence, but from the fact that Mystra is slain, reborn, and lives on in her successors only in vestiges.

Plot Hooks

Thwarting Fate: A cleric or paladin who serves Sune, goddess of love and beauty, is granted a grim vision of the future. A great resurgence of the spellplague might come to Faerûn unless two pivotal souls recently separated are reunited again. But who are they? A Zhentarim lord and the Cormyrean noblewoman he once loved? A Red Wizard of Thay and her apprentice? Discovering who these powerful souls are is half the quest, while helping them to mend their love is the other.

The Curse and the Kiss: A beloved priest of Boldrei, the Sovereign of Hall and Hearth, falls deathly ill from a curse levied against him by a cult of the Dragon Below. The other clerics cannot remove it, and the priest is slowly wasting away. An ancient scroll in one of Boldrei's oldest temples offers a mystic solution unique to the faith that sounds like something out of a tale from Thelanis: "The kiss alone from a husband's wife/Can banish the dark and grant him life." The problem? The priest's wife was incarcerated in the prison of Dreadhold more than ten years ago for heresy and murder. Adventurers who serve the Sovereign Host are asked by the clergy to travel to Dreadhold, secure the wife's temporary release from the dour Kundarak wardens (no easy feat!), and rekindle the fires of love.

NO LOVE FOR THE REST OF US?

Let's be honest: Usually it's the humans, elves, and half-elves that feature in the good love stories. But there's absolutely no reason why dwarves, gnomes, halflings, and half-orcs can't be drawn into stories of romance large and small. You might be playing a dragonborn, a tiefling, a genasi, a minotaur, or a shifter. The same factors apply. Tieflings might have horns and a tail, but you can be sure those characteristics factor into what they look for in a mate. And changelings can make any romance more interesting.

To be fair, not every player race has a gender. (I'm looking at you, warforged!) But that doesn't mean they can't be major players in a love story: Make Juliet a dragonmarked artificer of House Cannith and Romeo a dragonmarked duelist (swiftblade) of House Orien. Set the story in Sharn, the City of Towers, then swap out Juliet's nurse for a warforged. "He" is her confidant, her bodyguard, and her messenger. He's the hero fighting off House Thuranni assassins and the persistent lackeys of Baron Merrix (who stops at nothing to prevent the union), and he does this out of loyalty to his Cannith mistress, the young woman he has been guarding since she was an infant and he was fresh from the forge.

About the Author

Jeff LaSala is a writer/editor of speculative fiction and inquisitory game designer. His first Eberron® novel, *The Darkwood Mask*, showcased his love for all things dark, monstrous, and masked. He dwells in the chthonic depths of New York City, casting Foreshadows and imagining a world splintered into sorry hemispheres. At other times, he perches like a gargoyle over his website, jefflasala.com.

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Character Themes: Heroes of Cormyr

By Dan Anderson

Illustrations by William O'Connor, Claudio Pozas, Goran Josic

Developing your character into someone who has a rich story can be a fun and rewarding process. You likely have an idea of what race and what class you want to play, but you might have only a general idea of what your character's life was like before you start playing the character at the gaming table. A theme can help you flesh out your character and provide some options for developing his or her background.

This article details two character themes, the Purple Dragon and the Cormyrian battle mage.

Purple Dragon

Many able-bodied men and women of Cormyr have taken the oath of sworn service to the Crown of Cormyr and earned the title of Purple Dragon. Although an exceptional few rise to knighthood and become Purple Dragon Knights, the Purple Dragons are those trained soldiers loyal to Cormyr who are ready to serve in times of war.

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All loyal citizens are eligible to take the oath of the Purple Dragon when they reach maturity. Those of noble lineage are expected to take the oath and typically are trained for positions of leadership, while those of a common bloodline sign up for two years of service in the militia and undergo extensive training.

A lucky few are accepted as squires to Purple Dragon Knights. A squire's crest is emblazoned on a background of the liege's color, and these backgrounds are as numerous as the shades of the rainbow, though the purple dragon crest is never displayed on a black field. Those in direct service to the royal family and those who do not serve a particular noble bear their crests on a white background.

Purple Dragons' training consists of three schools of focus. The young and fearless begin their study by learning attack techniques that bring the fight to the enemy. Those who dream of advancing through the ranks to take positions of leadership study tactics to best take advantage of the battlefield. The most respected are those who train to protect key personnel, especially War Wizards, and do not hesitate to sacrifice themselves for the greater cause. Regardless of role, the Purple Dragons train to fight together as a unit. Loyalty, duty, and honor are valued above all else, and a unit of Purple Dragons can operate as a single machine, utilizing the strengths of the working whole over the individual weaknesses of each component.

Purple Dragons spend six months in extensive training. They are then assigned to a specific location to continue training while on active duty. Some receive assignments to serve in a major city and maintain the king's law; the largest such garrisons are in Suzail and Marsember. Others maintain border patrols as a first line of defense against Cormyr's enemies. After two years of service, some Purple Dragons choose the defense of Cormyr and enforcement of her laws as a career, but most return to their homes and professions until the need arises for them to bear arms in the name of the king. A rare few become adventurers, honing their skills so that they can be at their best when they are called back into service.

Creating a Purple Dragon

Loyalty to crown and country are paramount for a Purple Dragon, so there are no restrictions on class or race for citizens of Cormyr, who are mostly human. Non-native races often need to demonstrate their loyalty to prove their intentions before taking the oath.

Alignment Prerequisite: The Purple Dragons welcome any of good or lawful good alignment who take the oath to serve Cormyr and her king above all personal desires, and those who vow to protect all

CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. For example, if you're a human fighter who has the Purple Dragon theme, you might be a noble trained in the military, or have roots as a common farmer ready to bear arms in the militia to defend Cormyr. If you are a wizard or a sorcerer, you might have studied at the War Wizard Academy in Cormyr as an apprentice.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

citizens of Cormyr. Betrayal of one's oath or another Purple Dragon is an act of treason. Those who enter into this vow lightly might one day dangle at the end of a hangman's noose!

Starting Feature

During their training, Purple Dragons learn attack, defense, and tactical stances to enhance their fighting style. Most focus on mastering one style, though they can call upon their training for any of the three styles.

All Purple Dragons train with swords, quarterstaffs, spears, and myriad other weapons, since one never knows what will be available in times of need. Most brash recruits begin their study with attack forms, advancing wildly and forcefully to bring down their opponents quickly. The Purple Dragons' training harnesses that energy and enthusiasm to maximize the effectiveness of attacks while not exposing defenses unnecessarily. After months of training, a Purple Dragon can effortlessly improve his or her most common attack forms, without compromising other aspects of combat.

The second stage of training involves defense of others. Although most warriors can defend themselves in combat instinctively, protecting another while not shirking one's own defenses takes months of practice. Purple Dragons have the ability to interfere with the attacks of enemies that are aimed at their nearby allies.

Finally, battlefield positioning is ingrained in all Purple Dragons, whether commanding allies into advantageous positions or knowing instinctively how to follow orders. Working as part of a unit requires a Purple Dragon to be in an ideal position at all times.

Benefit: You gain the *focused discipline* power.

Focused Discipline Purple Dragon Utility

You call upon your training and adjust to the ebb and flow of battle, going on the offensive or falling back to defend yourself as the situation demands.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You enter the focused discipline stance. Until the stance ends, at the start of each of your turns you can choose one of the following benefits. The benefit lasts until the start of your next turn.

- ✦ **Offense:** You gain a +1 power bonus to melee basic attack rolls.
- ✦ **Defense:** Whenever you hit an enemy with a melee basic attack, one ally adjacent to you gains a +1 power bonus to all defenses until the start of your next turn.
- ✦ **Tactics:** After you hit an enemy with a melee basic attack, you can shift 1 square as a free action.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Purple Dragons are trained to handle situations as a single unit. This expertise is not limited to combat, and as a Purple Dragon rises in personal experience, he or she learns to work well with teammates to overcome numerous challenges. When someone takes the lead in a task, a Purple Dragon knows just what to do to lend a hand.

Benefit: When you use the aid another action and succeed, you grant an additional +1 bonus to the aided check.

Level 10 Feature

As Purple Dragons refine their *focused discipline* power, they master the basic styles of fighting. Their common attacks rival those that others can muster only once per encounter. The next step for Purple Dragons who reach this level of combat prowess is full knighthood, which requires completing a quest on behalf of a noble or otherwise furthering the interests of Cormyr.

Benefit: Once per encounter, when you use *focused discipline*, you can choose a second benefit at the start of one of your turns. Both benefits last until the start of your next turn.

Optional Powers

Purple Dragons train to fight as a team. Some choose powers to enhance their ability to work with others, which comes in handy when traveling with a group of adventurers.

Level 2 Utility Power

As a Purple Dragon, you have been trained to work closely with your allies, which provides you with both the ability to spot a weakness in a foe's defense and point it out to your teammates.

Exploit Opening Purple Dragon Utility 2

Your enemy deflects your blow, and you notice a weakness that your allies can exploit.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Free Action **Special**
Trigger: You miss an enemy with a melee attack.
Effect: The enemy grants combat advantage until the start of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power

With only a few words, a tactically minded Purple Dragon can issue orders to reposition allies on the battlefield. Other Purple Dragons instinctively close ranks to face the enemy.

Sudden Formation Purple Dragon Utility 6

As you bark a few short commands, your allies move into position.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Move Action **Close** burst 5
Target: Each ally in the burst
Effect: You move up to half your speed. Each target can then shift up to his or her speed to a square adjacent to you as a free action.

Level 10 Utility Power

Many Purple Dragons can use their training to warn allies of incoming attacks. The *unified resilience* power reflects how a Purple Dragon's warnings can turn a potentially devastating attack into a glancing blow.

Unified Resilience Purple Dragon Utility 10

Using your knowledge of battle, you call out warnings to nearby allies, helping them to avoid solid blows.

Daily ✦ Aura, Martial
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You activate an aura 1 that lasts until the end of the encounter. While in the aura, each ally who can hear you gains resistance to all damage equal to your highest ability modifier.

OATH TO THE CROWN OF CORMYR

I solemnly swear to serve Cormyr and her interests above all else. I vow to answer any call from the crown, the royal family, recognized nobles, and citizens in need, to the best of my ability. I promise that in time of war, I will return to my sworn position and bear arms in service to crown and country.

Cormyrian Battle Mage

Although any magician can create fire or force effects to hinder foes, a battle mage studies the art of maximizing his or her devastating effectiveness under the watchful eye of an established War Wizard. Those who truly master the craft might be invited to join the order of Cormyr's War Wizards, the elite battle casters sworn to the crown of Cormyr.

The War Wizards of Cormyr are a secretive group. They realize that if the secrets they discover are shared only with those within their ranks, they gain an edge over their enemies. They reveal some of these secrets through research, and they find others in long-lost tomes of lore. Many War Wizards send their battle mage apprentices out with adventurers, with strict instructions to return and share any ancient secrets they might uncover. Like Purple Dragons, War Wizards and battle mages must swear an oath of fealty to Cormyr before training begins.

Most battle mages are recruited as children when they show aptitude after being introduced to arcane theories or if they exhibit a natural talent for the arcane art. Some students who excel at their studies after being recruited are tested by a War Wizard and, if special talent is identified, they are taken from their families to learn at the War Wizard Academy. Only a few of those who achieve the mastery of basic arcane practices are admitted to the academy formally and are assigned to a particular War Wizard as an apprentice. The others are returned to their families. Having one's child selected to study with the War Wizards is considered a great honor.

Once admitted, an apprentice spends five years studying the basic tenets of wizardry. Over half cannot achieve the high standards set by the War Wizards and are dismissed. After five years of successful study, an apprentice gains the benefits and

official title of battle mage. He or she then studies additional secrets unique to the War Wizards.

A few adults petition the War Wizards for an apprenticeship to learn their secrets and master their craft. The War Wizards are suspicious of such requests and turn away those who have not gained the full trust of the crown or proven themselves loyal citizens. Petitioners must undergo a series of divinations and other tests to verify their intentions. They must also prove their value to the organization by providing new knowledge of the arcane arts or by teaching a new and useful spell. Only then can a practicing wizard or sorcerer become the apprentice of a War Wizard. The expectations for all battle mages are the same, regardless of age.

After becoming a battle mage, some thus titled request a sabbatical to travel the world so that they can learn mystical secrets to bring back to the organization and strengthen it.

Creating a Battle Mage

Class Prerequisite: Loyalty to crown and country is paramount for a battle mage. However, the War Wizards must also find value in the arcane arts that the apprentice brings to their organization. Only sorcerers and wizards can become Cormyrian battle mages.

Alignment Prerequisite: Any unaligned, good, or lawful good wizard or sorcerer who takes the oath to serve the realm, her king, and the War Wizards of Cormyr can become a Cormyrian battle mage. Breaking this oath is considered treason, and the organization will go to great lengths to prevent ex-members from revealing its secrets, most of which involve shaping spells on the battlefield and empowering spells to damage Cormyr's enemies.

Starting Feature

Cormyrian battle mages gain a basic understanding of the philosophy and tenets of the War Wizards. They do not study magic for the sake of arcane knowledge, but focus specifically on how they can enhance magic in battle.

The first stage of study is to learn to defend oneself from attacks while casting. A battle mage can cast spells quickly and gracefully without lowering defenses.

Next, battle mages must understand how combat ebbs and flows. They learn to recognize the value of each combatant in a battle and learn to use their spells to destroy the enemy while not hindering their own forces. It is rare for battle mages to fight a lone battle or a wizard's duel, since their purpose is to enhance the Purple Dragons of Cormyr. Personal glory is of little interest to War Wizards, and they instill this outlook within their battle mage apprentices. Value is placed on honing one's instincts to react to a changing battlefield and shaping spells to avoid allies while devastating enemy forces.

Finally, each battle mage is taught to be alert at all times. Many tactical tomes advise that taking out the enemy's leadership and spellcasters first is the best way to win a battle. While engaged in conflict, battle mages are aware that they are high-value targets, and they do whatever it takes to protect themselves from harm. This is not a selfish act, rather it is a recognition that the loss of one's power is a significant blow to allies during a battle.

Benefit: You gain the *defensive casting* power.

Defensive Casting Cormyrian Battle Mage Utility

You use one of the secret incantations of the War Wizards to protect yourself when casting.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, your ranged and area arcane powers do not provoke opportunity attacks.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

The War Wizards of Cormyr have entrusted you with some of the rare knowledge they have gathered about topics beyond the arcane.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to History checks and Religion checks.

Level 10 Feature

As one's training nears its culmination, each battle mage becomes attuned to sense potential dangers. You have an uncanny ability to know when you are about to be attacked and can react accordingly. Your arcane senses keep you safe from sudden danger.

Benefit: You cannot be surprised.

Optional Powers

A battle mage's training strongly encourages the use of offensive spells during mass combat. The secrets studied include ways to focus and shape arcane destructive power to maximize the effects on enemies while minimizing collateral damage to allies.

Level 2 Utility Power

On a crowded battlefield, it is often impossible for an arcane caster to avoid targeting his or her allies. With some study, you have learned to utter incantations to adjust your spells and reduce the chance of striking your allies.

Irregular Dispersal Cormyrian Battle Mage Utility 2

You control the energy of your spells to avoid hitting your friends.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You take a –4 penalty to attack rolls against your allies until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power

While destructive arcane spells explode around the battlefield, battle mages can use a complex cantrip attuned to their spells that wards an ally from their effect for a short time.

Attuned Wards Cormyrian Battle Mage Utility 6

You cover your nearby ally in an arcane cloak that offers protection from your attacks.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Close** burst 2
Target: One ally in the burst
Effect: The target takes no damage from your arcane attack powers until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

Battle mages learn to bring ultimate destruction to their enemies. Channeling such enormous amounts of power places tremendous strain on the caster, so it takes a bit of time for you to recover from empowering a spell in this manner.

Unleash Devastation Cormyrian Battle Mage Utility 10

You channel all your strength into one furious attack.

Daily ✦ Arcane
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You roll damage for an arcane attack power and dislike the result.
Effect: You reroll as many of the damage dice as you like, but you must use the second result.

About the Author

Dan Anderson is the *Living* FORGOTTEN REALMS (LFR) writing director for the Calimshan story area and the Epic campaign. He has written several LFR adventures, including *Fury of the Queen of Thorns*, *Cracks in the Crimson Cage*, *The Menace of Memnon*, and *The Agony of Almraiven*. Dan also wrote the "Backdrop: Xiousing" article in the October 2011 issue of *Dungeon*.

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The Ranks and Titles of Cormyr

By Brian Cortijo

Illustrations by Hector Ortiz and Claudio Pozas

"I give my loyal service unfailingly to the Mage Royal of Cormyr, in full obedience of speech and action, that peace and order shall prevail in the Forest Kingdom, that magic of mine and others be used and not misused. I do this in trust that the Mage Royal shall unswervingly serve the throne of Cormyr, and if the Mage Royal should fall, or fail the Crown and Throne, my obedience shall be to the sovereign directly. Whenever there is doubt and dispute, I shall act to preserve Cormyr. Sunrise and moonfall, as long as my breath takes and my eyes see, I serve Cormyr. I pledge my life that the realm endure."

–The Oath of the War Wizard

Titles, ranks, positions, and honors are awarded in Cormyr for services great and small. Some are of little consequence to adventurers, who usually have no interest in being named Underscribe of the Understair or Lord Keeper of the Virgin Wood. Other adventurers, however, might—through no fault of their own—end up working in the direct service of Cormyr and its monarch, King Foril. In doing so, they might be honored with ranks or titles, or with positions of authority and command, especially as they rise to national importance and take on threats to the kingdom.

Descriptions of the most important of these titles appear below. Each bears with it duties, privileges, and adventuring opportunities that otherwise might be closed off to adventurers with less interest in serving Cormyr in an official capacity. Because few heroes might wish to be weighed down by such responsibility, the option exists to delay an appointment or investiture of nobility until after one's retirement.

Registration as Title

Even in the absence of a rank of honor or a title of nobility, most adventurers are already registered, in one form or another, with the Crown of Cormyr if they wish to operate within the kingdom. This registration carries certain responsibilities, but also grants certain rights.

Chartered Adventurers

The most common form of registration is that of a chartered adventuring company. Once prohibitively expensive for all but the most successful of adventuring bands, a charter now costs a mere 25 gp (renewable annually) for a party of between five and thirty adventurers, although the Crown encourages groups of more than a dozen to register as mercenary

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bands. A charter for adventuring permits the bearers to wield and carry weapons openly—although they must still obey laws of peace-bonding weapons within cities and towns—as well as allowing the heroes to accept contracts for defense of legitimate persons. A company that fails to renew is declared outlaw and can be hunted down by any chartered company. Successful adventuring companies can seek a full royal charter, signed by the king's hand. Such charters cost upward of 1,000 gp.

Any adventuring company can, by royal decree, have its charter revoked for treason or other crimes. More often, the Crown raises the charter renewal levy so high that the company cannot afford its fee, and its members must disband or become outlaws.

Mercenary Companies

Typically larger than a chartered adventuring band, a mercenary company has the same rights as one, is permitted to maintain a larger roll of members (thirty standing members, plus up to one hundred recruits in times of crisis), and has more latitude in recruitment and reporting to the Crown. The price for this freedom is steep: 20,000 gp for the initial charter, with an annual renewal fee of 3,000 gp (plus 25 gp for each individual who was temporarily recruited over the last year).

Registered Mages

Every wizard, sorcerer, warlock, or anyone else capable of casting powerful, destructive spells of arcane magic must register with a local lord, a herald, or the War Wizards. Registered spellcasters are allowed to practice openly and can be approached by the Crown for research, hired spellcasting, other assignments or recruitment into the War Wizards. Registered mages can attend the monthly meetings of the Council of Mages, and those who acquit themselves well might be asked to join the Mage Councilors.

A spellcaster who refuses to register can function legally without fear of punishment, but such a person who is found to have slain another with magic, or otherwise broken Cormyr's laws, can be marked a renegade mage. Such individuals are hunted with impunity by the War Wizards, and can be captured by chartered adventurers and registered spellcasters without fear of Crown reprisal.

Spellcasters who are members of a chartered adventuring band are automatically registered under the group's charter, and need not fear the War Wizards seeking them out.

KNOW THE LAND

The titles in this article are presented with their current holders named, if those positions are filled. This is not to suggest that a worthy, ambitious servant of the Dragon Throne might not succeed one of these nobles. A number of officers of the realm are on the cusp of retirement, and mishap or treachery might cause other positions to open up.

Whether for the sake of supplanting an existing noble or just learning the landscape, every social climber and worthy noble knows who holds power, who is higher than whom on society's ladder, and the best means of climbing it oneself. An officer of Cormyr would do well to learn the significance of the important titles, and be aware of whom to obey when the time comes.

Politics is a dangerous business, and don't doubt for a moment that the Cormyrean military and its War Wizards are political arenas just as much as the Royal Court.

Titles of Nobility

At the top of the pyramid of title and privilege in Cormyr is the nobility: the heredity bearers of authority of the realm, charged with safeguarding its people and serving its crowned heads.

Duties and Privileges

Nobility carries with it a number of benefits. Nobles can keep armed retinues (the extent of which is determined by the family, the title, when it was issued, and the relevant royal proclamations), maintain fortified residences, hire mercenary bands, pass heraldic blazons to their children, and serve as de facto officers in the Purple Dragons. They have the power to detain or arrest—but not to put on trial or punish—commoners who commit crimes on their lands or in their presence, as well as the ability to petition and advise the Crown directly, without the need to find an advocate at Court. Unlike common Cormyreans, nobles can walk with weapons unbonded, although this is customarily seen with decorative court swords and not true, battle-ready blades.

In return for these rights and privileges, every noble must swear fealty directly to both the monarch and the Crown. He or she must maintain a retinue for conscription into the Purple Dragons, in addition to being prepared to serve actively (or to fund an appropriate body of soldiers). Nobles also pay taxes to the Crown based on the expected level of wealth for their station and holdings; rather than being subject to the "indignity" of a visit from the royal exchequer, each noble is assigned a sum (which of course all nobles consider far too high) that he or she must pay the Crown's coffers.

Nobles do not have the right to swear individuals to their personal service or the service of their families, nor can they accept oaths of fealty from other nobles.

Titles

The nobility of Cormyr is organized into a loose hierarchy consisting of several distinct ranks, which are granted by the monarch. Although familial loyalties, debts of honor, property or service, and binding contracts require nobles to fulfill an obligation to their fellows, none are permitted to swear oaths of fealty to any but the king.

In earlier generations, when nobles were entitled to amass their own personal armies, their titles delineated just how large a force an individual family might muster. Now, though the hierarchy remains, it has little real impact on just how powerful a family is (that is, of course, outside social circles).

The nobles of Cormyr owe their fealty to the monarch of the realm, currently King Foril Obarskyr. A female monarch is known as a **queen**, as is the wife of a king (a ruling queen's husband is a **prince-consort**). Their children are the princes and princesses of the kingdom, with the heir apparent being known as the crown prince or crown princess. The reigning monarch might wear any number of crowns at different times (there have been a large number of crowns throughout Cormyr's history), but the favored is the three-spired golden Crown of Rhiiman, each spire with an amethyst set onto it. The immediate heir to the throne, by ancient tradition, wears only a simple, golden circlet. The current heir to the throne is Crown Prince Irvel Obarskyr.

Below the royal family are the dukes and duchesses of the realm. Even influential nobles almost never attain this rank, which is usually reserved for relatives of the monarch (including the heads of Houses Truesilver and Crownsilver, who hold ancient blood ties to the Crown). Occasionally, however, a great hero might be raised to the title of duke, with a lesser title being passed to his offspring. When Crown Prince Irvel's son Baerovus ascends the Dragon Throne after his father, his sister Princess Raedra will be known as duchess royal, as will any other princes and princesses of the realm who do not rule. At present, in addition to the royal houses, only the heads of House Illance and House Marliir hold the rank of duke.

Immediately below these nobles are the ranks of marchion and marchioness. Granted more rarely than the rank of duke, they are traditionally bestowed upon nobles that serve the crown as frontier lords in dangerous territories—a sort of service that Cormyr has not truly required for years. The acquisition of such a noble title is considered to be a great honor, though the heirs to the peerage created by the rank are invariably of a lesser rank, usually earls or barons, rather than inheriting the full rank of their invested parents.

Next lower in the social hierarchy are the earls (never "counts," because of possible confusion with the title "corount") and countesses (who are addressed as "Lady," except by heralds and court scribes), who make up a goodly number of the eldest noble houses of the realm. Those families that trace their claims of nobility to other kingdoms, namely Marsember or Esparin, were once ranked as counts, but this usage has since died out along with the families that bore the titles.

Viscounts and viscountesses sit below the earls of the kingdom, with barons and baronesses below them.

The next lower in the hierarchy are baronets and baronetesses. Noble houses more than three generations old are populated by more nobles of this rank than any other, thanks to the means by which noble titles are distributed after the death of a title-holder.

At the bottom of the noble ranks is the knight. This title is applied to both men and women, but as a form of address, females are styled "Lady Knight." Knights do not inherit their titles, nor do they pass them to their offspring; a knighthood is earned through service to the Crown. Although knights do not gain the markers of rank of true nobles, they are officers of the Purple Dragons, with the ability to command obedience as a swordcaptain that outranks the higher baronets.

Titles below the rank of duke are associated with a specific region of Cormyr or its immediate environs. Although this association brings no true authority over that region, most nobles make a token attempt to maintain a residence, or at least a small building to use as a retreat, within the nominal area of their realms.

Family Rulership

Within each named family—regardless of how many members of a given house hold noble titles of their own—the members answer to a single, recognized head who is formally responsible before the Crown for the family's actions. The head of a noble house is treated with respect by officials of the realm and by other nobles, effectively honoring the noble as though he possessed a title one rank higher. The head of a house is the most direct descendant of the house's founder and does not necessarily hold the highest noble rank in a given house.

It is possible for noble houses to fracture, particularly when a younger line of the house is elevated to a higher rank of nobility. In such cases, either the house must recognize the new titleholder as the lord or lady of the family, or the newly elevated noble must separate and found a new house, with a new name to be presented at Court.

Extraordinary Titles

The Crown frequently creates titles that cannot be passed on to descendants or other inheritors. Such grants, known as extraordinary titles, do not persist beyond the death of the bearer. These titles are the customary means of rewarding nonhuman servants of the kingdom, who cannot truly be accepted by the human nobility (due to longevity, odd abilities, or sheer racism), but are willing to accept the honor of being named a trusted defender of the Crown.

On Matters of Inheritance

A hereditary noble's title is affected most strongly by the circumstances of that noble's birth: the rank of the parent holding the relevant title, the order of birth, and the family's position with the Crown. Until they ascend to a title in their own right (by the death of a relative or a direct award of a title), nobles are treated as possessors of a courtesy title one or more ranks lower than that of the noble parent: the first children of dukes and marchions are earls and countesses; the first children of earls are viscounts; the first children of viscounts are barons; and the first children of barons are baronets, with descending titles for younger children based on the various included titles of the parent.

When a noble dies, his or her titles pass to the children, in roughly the same order that their courtesy titles were assigned (a number of royal grants have special terms by which this is done). When the direct heir assumes the title of the deceased parent and ascends in rank, younger children officially assume the rank which they held in courtesy while their parent lived. Over generations, this process repeats, such that most members of a given noble family are ranked as baronets, with other titles distributed among the various branches of the house.

BY ANY OTHER NAME

The titles of nobility presented here are given in the Common tongue. Most Cormyreans speak Chondathan as well. Presented here are the equivalent ranks in the Chondathan language.

King: Astrel ("Az-*trell*")
Queen: Araunna ("Arr-*awn*-ah")
Prince: Ardyr ("Ar-*deer*")
Princess: Ardess ("Ar-*dess*")
Duke: Storn
Duchess: Staerra ("*Stair*-ah")
Marchion: Mahrsar ("*Mar*-sarr")
Marchioness: Mahrsara
Earl: Velm ("*Vel*-mm")
Countess: Velana ("Vell-*anna*")
Viscount: Tlarvelm ("*Tah*-lar-velm")
Viscountess: Tlarvelana ("*Tah*-lar-velanna")
Baron (in Cormyr, includes Baronet): Taen ("*Tayn*")
Baroness (in Cormyr, includes Baronetess): Taenya ("*Tay*-nyah")
Knight: Tahar ("*Tah*-har")
Lord: Aro ("*Air*-o")
Lady: Arauna ("*Air*-on-ah")
Sir: Saer ("*Say*-ur")

Markers and Symbols

In addition to the heraldic devices possessed by every noble family, each noble who holds a title in his or her own right (that is, a noble who carries a true title, and not a courtesy title from a relative) also possesses a crown of rank. This crown is a two-spired circlet of steel, onto which are welded different ornaments to delineate increased rank. Higher-titled nobles have their crowns plated in silver, and later gilded, to mark their status.

Nobles and the Purple Dragons

Nobles, by virtue of their rank and position, hold authority over the Purple Dragons in time of war or crisis. The rank and file must obey nobles as though they were swordcaptains, because the nobles by definition hold a title of at least baronet. Earls hold the authority of ornrions, as do the heads of the noble houses. Dukes of the realm command with the authority of overswords.

Actual, ranked officers hold greater authority than nobles of "equivalent" rank, but in practice, the rank and file of the Purple Dragons first obey their immediate superiors, and follow the lead of firstswords and swordcaptains in determining whether the noble barking orders has the necessary wits to command soldiers. Crownsilver, Illance, Rowanmantle, and Truesilver nobles are usually esteemed above their rank by the Dragons around them. In contrast, the Dracohorns are currently so poorly regarded by Cormyr's soldiery that, if placed at the head of an army, they might be giving orders to companies of men afflicted with selective deafness.

Military Hierarchy

Joining Cormyr's military is a simple affair: show up, demonstrate the ability to march in armor and swing a weapon competently, and take an oath. Unlike with the nobility, the ranks of the Purple Dragons are a straightforward vertical organization, in which each person knows to whom he or she answers.

Service and Sacrifice

Purple Dragons are expected to fight and, if necessary, die for the Forest Kingdom. Those who serve in the armies of Cormyr do so on a year-round basis, engaging in regular skirmishes with humanoid bands and roving bandits, training in the kingdom's forts, or policing the streets of its cities and towns.

Some of the membership serves on detached duty, ready to be called back into service at a moment's notice, but otherwise free to pursue other, more specialized missions in the service of the Crown, whether it be in the company of a highknight or a War Wizard, as the bodyguard to a noble or envoy, or as part of an elite cadre of Crown agents in service to the Court. Such adventuring Purple Dragons are rare, but they do exist, and among them are numbered some of the greatest (if unsung) heroes of the realm.

Through the Ranks

Rank-and-file Purple Dragons begin their tenure as blades, or typical foot soldiers. Blades have no authority of their own beyond the power to make arrests or challenge intruders while on duty. A veteran blade, or a Purple Dragon who has experience as a mercenary or an adventurer, can be awarded the rank of telsword, with the power to lead small patrols of up to half a dozen blades.

A firstsword is the senior soldier and leader of a small force (typically fewer than a dozen, though it can number as high as twenty). A firstsword has the authority to make reports, give testimony, disarm and detain unchartered adventurers, and otherwise operate without strict supervision.

Serving under royal warrant, the swordcaptain is the lowest rank of officer in the Purple Dragons. Swordcaptains serve as the heads of companies of soldiers, as lieutenants to commissioned officers, as patrol captains and shift officers, and in any number of other roles within the military. Swordcaptains have the right to wear weapons unbound when they're not on official duty, and can swear soldiers into the service of the Crown. They also have the power to promote a blade to the rank of telsword, and to recommend the promotion of a telsword to firstsword.

Lionar is the lowest commissioned rank in the army of the Purple Dragon, and it is a position of great trust. In addition to commanding over one hundred soldiers trained to fight for the realm, lionars can promote or strip of rank any subordinate Purple Dragon (although, in the case of a swordcaptain, only on a temporary basis), can accept soldiers into service, and can requisition from the Crown additional supplies of food, tents, and weapons.

An ornrion is an officer of middling rank, often assigned as a lieutenant to a higher-ranking officer or as a commander over a larger company of Purple Dragons. Ornrions can issue warrants of swordcaptaincy, can strip such warrants, and can deny pay—or

expel entirely—Purple Dragons for offenses against their fellows.

Officers of high rank, constals command full brigades of troops, and are either of noble birth or invested with a title of full nobility before being assigned such a weighty task. A constal can issue and strip commissions of lower officers, and can overturn the decisions of lesser officers.

The general officers of the realm use two ranks: the older oversword and the newer, more elevated battlemaster. Although battlemasters are formally above overswords in the ranking structure, overswords serve as garrison commanders and leaders of fortifications, whereas battlemasters are responsible for the handling of mobile troops and the gathering of disparate companies into cohesive armies during times of war. An oversword or a battlemaster has the authority to execute a member of the Purple Dragons for mutiny, and to bring charges of desertion against nobles serving with their armies.

Within the kingdom, wardship or another military title is given over different regions of the nation. Currently, the Eastern Marches (which include Hullack, the area around Tilverton, and the area east of Arabel) are protected by the Warden of the Eastern Marches. The Warden answers only to the king and to the High Marshal of the realm. The current Warden is Warvred Emmarask, who operates out of Castle Crag, and was dubbed an earl when he was assigned the post by King Foril.

There was rumor of such a post being created for the Northern Marches (to include, among other areas, the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands) under the kings Azoun IV and V, but this has never come to pass.

The highest officer in the realm, answering only to the king, is High Marshal of the Kingdom. Currently, this position is filled by Crown Prince Irvel, who wears a variation of the High Marshal's badge on his tabard when he rides at the head of a Purple Dragon patrol.

Markers and Symbols

The Purple Dragons wear a basic uniform composed of a white tabard emblazoned with the purple dragon device of Cormyr. On the left shoulder is embroidered a shield-shaped badge depicting the soldier's rank, which is sewn and outlined so that it is clearly visible and recognizable from a short distance. Other markers—such as a company badge, or representations of honors received by a soldier—appear on the left breast, above the edge of the shield device. The nation's navy, the Blue Dragons, uses the same ranks as the army does, although most sailors are telswords, and swordcaptains are not often present on board ships. The Blue Dragons use a blue dragon device on their tabards, which are seldom worn except in port.

Nobles who are serving with the Purple Dragons (with or without formal rank) have war helms specially constructed to represent their crown of noble title, so they are easily recognized in the chaos of the battlefield.

Wizardly Ranks and Titles

Wizards and other arcane casters abound in Cormyr, whether occupied in shoring up its defenses, creating magic items, or inadvertently unleashing ancient, unspeakable horrors upon the populace. Cormyr is a land of magic, and its inhabitants long ago learned to honor—and fear—the power that magic brings its wielders.

War Wizards

The Brotherhood of Wizards of War is the spellcasting arm of Cormyr's defense. The War Wizards' numbers are not known accurately by any living beings except Ganrahast and Lord Warder Vainrence. It is suspected that the group now numbers between five hundred and twelve hundred mages.

Given that War Wizards perform so many different functions—from research and item creation, to the reinforcement of palace wards, to espionage,

Titles and Adventuring Parties

Player characters represent the rarest of beings, individuals of great personal power who amass influence and wealth at a far greater rate than others. Because of this fact, as the Crown recognizes their contributions to the realm and seeks to reward and maintain their loyalty and service, adventurers can easily rise in rank or gather titles.

Although these ranks can be used as powerful story awards, great care should be taken not to allow a granted title to disrupt the flow of gameplay. Ranks and titles are meant to enrich roleplaying opportunities, not to allow one character to literally lord over the people he or she encounters. If multiple members of a single party possess different ranks or titles from the Crown, that state of affairs can create interesting situations and social encounters, but the game shouldn't be permitted to descend into player debates about whose title outstrips the others.

For example, it's entirely feasible to have a party with a lionar warlord, a War Wizard, a highknight rogue, and a fighter who is a member of a noble house. Whereas the noble's access or the War Wizard's responsibilities might open doors for the group, and the lionar might have troops at his command, there's nothing heroic about spending an entire gaming session debating who is "in charge."

Unless, of course, your group enjoys that sort of thing, in which case, have at it! Just remember to keep the debates in character.

to battlefield aid—any attempts to narrow the estimate are too speculative to be of any real use. Since Foril's reign began, an increasing number of swordmages have joined the brotherhood, leading to a more military bent to its philosophies and operations.

The War Wizards have no outwardly discernible hierarchy of command. Each War Wizard knows to whom he or she answers thanks to the meticulously worded commands of their superiors, the Royal Magician and the Lord Warder. They stand outside the chain of command of the Purple Dragons, even when attached directly to a unit, and can be called away from that group on more urgent matters at a moment's notice.

Alarphons

The only formal rank within the War Wizards is that of alarphon. The internal investigators of the War Wizards, alarphons are empowered to ask questions and engage in magical interrogation of their own number in order to ferret out treachery and learn whether other members of the brotherhood have not been forthcoming with information important to the protection of the realm. Whether this reluctance is due to perfidy or mere stupidity, sometimes the realm must be defended from its own protectors, and the alarphons are charged with that defense.

Lord Warder

The first recipient of this new title under Royal Magician Ganrahast, Lord Warder Vainrence is the battlefield commander of the War Wizards, reinforcing the brotherhood's new role in the active defense of the realm. The Lord Warder answers to the Royal Magician, to the Court Wizard (if different from the Royal Magician), and to the Crown; in military matters, the Lord Warder also submits to the High Marshal.

Royal Magician

In his capacity as Royal Magician or Mage Royal—but never "royal mage"—Ganrahast is responsible for the overall magical well-being of the realm, the defense of the royal family (including the construction of magical wards for the palace), providing advice to the monarch, and seeing to the proper education of future rulers. He is also the absolute authority on issues of magical use in Cormyr, and the commanders of the War Wizards are subordinate to him.

Although Royal Magician is not officially a hereditary title, all of Cormyr's mages royal have been descendants of the first Royal Magician, Baerauble Etharr, and his eladrin bride, Alea Dahast. The only possible exception to this succession—depending on whom you believe—was Caladnei, who came into the position after her appointment by Vangerdahast. In spite of rumors about Caladnei's true lineage, in the whole of Cormyr's history, only three decades have seen a Mage Royal not of Baerauble's line.

Mage Councilors

The Council of Mages meets on the fourteenth day of each month at the Royal Court in Suzail. At each meeting, royal proclamations relevant to the use of magic are made public, matters of employment for workers of magic are discussed, and mages—including the War Wizards—accept inquiries for service or advertise their need for the assistance of other spellcasters.

The mages councilor of the kingdom are selected from among the wisest and most capable wizards, sorcerers, swordmages, and other registered arcane spellcasters of Cormyr. The council also advises the king, through the office of Court Wizard.

Court Wizard

The Court Wizard oversees the Council of Mages. He or she is responsible for its operation, the appointment of new members to the group, the registration of mages in the Forest Kingdom, and advising the Crown on matters of magical concern. Because the War Wizards fall under the authority of the Council of Mages, the Court Wizard is also responsible for selecting its commander, who then reports to the Royal Magician.

To add to the complexity, the Court Wizard is bound to obey the king and his family (spouse and children), whereas the Mage Royal answers only to the king and the Court Wizard. This conflict of authority has meant that most Royal Magicians have officially served as Court Wizard as well. Except during a brief period in his youth, Royal Magician Ganrahast has also been Court Wizard, and so owes his obedience only to King Foril.

Spies and Agents

The Crown engages any number of individual agents, spies, courtiers, informants, and observers to protect its interests and the safety of the realm. Although most loyal servants go unheralded or die unnoticed in pursuit of missions for the Dragon Throne, one group is officially known and bears the formal authority of the king when it investigates matters.

Although it is not technically a rank of nobility, highknight is a title devised by Vangerdahast and Filfaeril, created during the reign of Azoun IV. It is a rank of service, denoting the faith of the Crown in the recipient and the loyalty of the individual receiving it. Each highknight is also a knight of the realm—and entitled to the privileges that title carries—but can command obedience from knights as well as commoners. A highknight can question any subject of the realm, including the highest nobles, and accuse (with evidence) anyone of a crime.

SLANG AND EPITHETS

A great number of insults, compliments, and oaths have been formed over the years in response to various shifts in titles and rank. A few slang terms currently in use by, or employed in reference to, servants of the realm include these.

Count: A defunct title, equivalent in rank to earl. Now used derisively to refer to the useless husband of a noblewoman of any rank.

Highnose: An effete or snooty noble.

Lackshield: A Purple Dragon that has been stripped of rank. Or, a noble in command of Purple Dragons who holds no true rank.

Oldblood: Said of a noble house of great age and respected reputation.

Red Dragon: A traitor to the kingdom (from the device of Salember, the Rebel Prince).

Swordlord: A respected Purple Dragon officer (or a noble serving as commander of Purple Dragons); used to elevate the subject in the eyes of the listener.

Spellbeggar: A War Wizard's insulting term for clerics and other divine spellcasters.

Positional and Unique Titles

Woven throughout the levels of hierarchy in Cormyr are a number of posts, appointments, and unique titles that interact with the officers and nobles of the realm, standing outside their circles but nonetheless holding influence over them.

King's Lords

Scattered across the realm are cities, towns, and smaller settlements ruled by the King's Lords—those people appointed as governors, to speak for the Crown, dispense justice, collect taxes, and organize the defense of the realm. A noble of at least baron rank (whether inherited or appointed), a King's Lord is the ultimate authority in a governed area, overseeing trials of accused criminals, appointing guard captains and other officers, and otherwise making sure that King Foril's will is carried out.

Heralds

Each lord is aided in his or her ("Lord" is applied to both male and female holders of the post) duties by an appointed herald. Not to be confused with the High Heralds, who maintain the proper succession of titles across Faerûn, these officials are responsible for keeping the lord's records of taxation, births, and deaths; the licensing of certain merchants and businesses; the registration of local mages; and the distribution of pay to the lord's guards, garrisons, and clerks. From time to time an experienced herald is elevated to lord of his or her city or town because of the intimate knowledge that individual possesses of the region.

Lord Commanders

The highest resident officers at their respective fortifications, the lord commanders of the kingdom are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the realm's castles and forts, the welfare of the men garrisoned there, and the proper defense of the passes and roads over which they are meant to guard. Oversword Raoulas Cormaeril, Lord Commander of High Horn Hold, holds the most coveted of these posts.

Baron of the Stonelands

For more than one hundred years, the Dragon Throne has promised the title Baron of the Stonelands to anyone that can fortify a keep in the Stonelands, maintain a retinue of armed soldiers, and prove—through the capture or slaying of bandits and killing of humanoids and monsters—that they can defend a parcel of the region for at least a full year. The reward for this endeavor is great: the formal title of baron and the equivalent rank of oversword in the Purple Dragons, with a hefty stipend to maintain their outpost. To date, none have succeeded, and no one has tried for more than two decades.

Court Titles

More than one hundred unique court titles are assigned to various pages, officers, clerks, and other staff at the Royal Court or working in the Palace of the Purple Dragon. Most people see little honor in the titles of royal cellarer, protocol chamberlain, chatelaine, or seneschal, but these people are vital to the maintenance of the realm's grandeur. One such court title, however, has vastly increased in influence over the last three hundred years.

Royal Sage Most Learned

Over the last few centuries, no title has grown in importance or prestige as has the Royal Sage Most Learned to the Royal Court. Officially, the Sage is the kingdom's expert on law, history, and languages—and each of the Sages has performed that task admirably. Unofficially, the Royal Sage has become one of the most trusted advisors to the Crown, advising on matters of diplomacy and etiquette, as well as studying more obscure bits of magical history and lore to better understand the wards protecting the royal buildings.

The current Royal Sage Most Learned is Ossani Eveningspire.

Defender

This special honorific is granted by the Crown to elevate the bearer to a special status: a noble who has formal military rank as well. Although a defender might conceivably hold any particular noble and military rank, in practice, a typical holder of the title is both a baron of the realm and a constal of the Purple Dragons.

Corount

Among oldest words the Common tongue, a corount is an officer—either a courtier or military commander—temporarily elevated to the ranks of the nobility by the Crown after the rightful holder of the title has suddenly died, gone missing, or become incapacitated, and the throne wishes to investigate before assigning a successor or more permanent replacement. Effectively a form of regency for a noble house, only trusted agents are named corounts, to ensure that the appointment is truly temporary.

About the Author

Brian Cortijo is a freelance game designer and fiction author who's been playing in the backroads and underhalls of Cormyr for years, and is thrilled to finally bring some of that work to light. His thanks, as always, go out to Ed Greenwood, for the Realms, and for trusting him with the sandbox (and especially the shinier toys).

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Blades of Kings

The Cormyrean Swords of State

By Brian Cortijo

Illustration by Hector Ortiz

Every nation worthy of the name has its swords of kingship. Tethyr, Impiltur, elven Myth Drannor, and the undersea realms as well . . . even some of the petty baronies of the Border Kingdoms boast blades whose ownership proves the right to rule. Cormyr is blessed with four such weapons—and two others besides if they are ever found. Many warriors hope for the chance to wield such fine steel once in their lives, or they hope to cut down those foolish enough to try to raid the royal grounds and escape with these blades. Still others seek the Lost Blades avidly so that they can better serve the Forest Kingdom or strike down the Obarskyr line and claim the Dragon Throne themselves.

The Four Swords

The four Swords of State rest in the Shrine of the Four Swords, which is down the long public corridor from the Chamber of the Purple Dragon in the Royal Court (see "Cormyr Royale" in *Dungeon* 198 for details about the shrine). The swords rest on raised, velvet-covered plinths beneath magic crystal domes that sound out alarms in certain circumstances. Each is sheathed in a fine scabbard that is decorated with exquisite, expertly cut sapphires. People come to pray beside the swords, whispering secret desires and asking for guidance, fortitude, or luck in upcoming endeavors.

Each of the royal blades has its own function and duty. *Ansrivarr* is as old as the realm, and it represents the endurance of the kingdom and its royal line. *Orbyn* is the blade of the nation's warrior-kings, on which all oaths of evidence before the Crown are sworn. *Rissar* serves as the blade over which blood oaths and oaths of marriage are sworn. *Symylazarr* is Cormyr's Font of Honor, used to raise nobles and honor the service of knights.

The four swords are clearly weapons of exceptional make and magical power, but some believe they are artifacts bound to Cormyr's past and future: items that cannot be altered by any known means. Damaging or destroying them requires immense effort and will bring about the vengeance of House Obarskyr and loyal Cormyreans once they learn of the deed.

One of the Swords of State could fall into an adventurer's hands in a number of ways. An adventurer could defeat a thief that escaped with the weapon; he or she could be forced to take up one of the blades during an attack on the Royal Court; or one might use trickery to steal the weapon from the shrine. Only a blood Obarskyr, or one who is approved by the Crown directly (as are the Royal Magician and the Lord Warder, and—it is presumed—the future spouses of Prince Baerovus and Princess Raedra), may remove one of the swords without punishment.

Claiming one of the Swords of State is not as simple as wresting it from the hands of its current wielder, and taking advantage of its powers or its value in gold or *residuum* is more difficult than selling or disenchanting the blade. The Crown of Cormyr holds these weapons among its greatest treasures,

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and will do whatever it can to regain them: first by diplomacy, then by trade, and finally, if necessary, by violent means. Officials of Cormyr treat any of the Swords of State as rare items when determining their value for reward—or ransom—and they pay the full value of the magical properties (and possibly more, depending on the circumstances of the weapon's disappearance and recovery) to place the weapon back in Crown hands.

In addition to the generous stance the Dragon Throne takes in dealing with persons possessing a piece of its regalia, it is willing to trade weapons obtained through heroic defense of the kingdom for one of the many swords in the fabled collection of the late King Azoun IV, who collected dozens of magic swords of various types and enchantments—including some that mirror or dwarf the powers of the Swords of State.

Ansrivarr, Blade of Memory

Carried by Mondar Bleth from Old Impiltur when he and his family arrived in what would later become Suzail, this ancient, battered blade is older than the realm. Taken up by Faerlthann First-King when Mondar was slain by the elves who then ruled Cormyr (though every tale told of the slaying blames the attack on orcs), *Ansrivarr* was the sword worn by Faerlthann and all his sons during their reigns. It was later replaced by finer steel blades crafted to each monarch's taste in successive generations, becoming little more than an object of ceremony. For generations, the only use for *Ansrivarr* has been in the coronation of Cormyr's kings.

Unknown to the Obarskyr kings, Baerauble Etharr and the elves of Iliphar's court (more specifically, Baerauble's beloved, Alea Dahast) wove countless protective enchantments into the blade, making it nigh invulnerable. Due to its being the sword that represents the kingdom, tale upon tale connects the fate of the realm to that of the blade, and every precaution was taken in those earliest days to prevent dire fates from coming to pass for the sword and the kingdom.

Ansrivarr is a +4 *staggering greatsword*.

Orbyn, Edge of Justice

Forged by Amedahast for King Duar soon after the death of Baerauble and her ascension as High Mage, *Orbyn* is an exceptionally powerful weapon. Commonly referred to as "Orblyn" thanks to the speech impediment of a former king and the unwillingness of a scribe to contradict his liege, the sword is used to swear oaths of evidence at the Royal Court and to execute nobles guilty of capital crimes. It is also widely accepted as the proper blade of kings.

Orbyn is a finely crafted longsword with intricate, barely visible runes trailing up and down its blade; those holding the sword have noted that the runes seem to move. It has defeated many threats to the Crown, including Magrath the Minotaur—the pirate captain that took Suzail from Duar—and the ancient Thauglor, from whom the Purple Dragons take their name.

Orbyn is a +5 *shearing longsword*.

EXPANDING ON THE SWORDS OF STATE

The powers attributed to each of the weapons in this article assumes that they are "mere" magic swords that happen to be tied to Cormyr's history. You might, however, decide that the rumors about one or more of these blades are true and want them to possess the greater power of an artifact.

If you do present one of the weapons as an artifact, you can add powers to the individual swords as best fits your ongoing campaign. There are, however, certain powers that some of the blades are rumored to possess or that have not come into play since before the Spellplague struck.

Rumored Abilities

- *Ilbratha*, Mistress of Battles, received its epithet not only for its leaping ability, but because of its ability to create a *mirror image* (as the wizard spell) of the wielder. Some tales describe how the sword permits the wielder to blink between the Feywild and the material world.
- When held by a blood Obarskyr, *Orbyn* can detect any untruths spoken by someone who touches the bared blade of the sword, as if the person is affected by the Discern Lies ritual. A more dreadful rumor holds that one slain by *Orbyn* cannot be raised from the dead by any means short of the direct intervention of a deity.
- After swearing a blood oath over *Rissar*, the person swearing such an oath pays a terrible price for violating a vow. Until the violation is remedied, the oathmaker suffers a grievous, bleeding wound with every strike from the Wedding Blade.
- Gantharla's sword *Shiningbite* is said to have absorbed some power from Eaerdynnansczyg (pronounced "ee-*air*-din-*ann*-shig"), and it draws energy from the death of its victims, spouting draconic flame each time it takes a life.
- The runes of *Symylazarr* can relay a message to one who is carefully watching and who knows which symbol represents which ancient noble house. The runes glow faintly when a momentous occasion passes, emitting blue light for a noble birth, red for a noble death, and yellow for a betrayal of the Crown. The light persists for only a matter of seconds, and it often goes unmarked by onlookers.

Shearing Weapon Level 17+ Uncommon

This weapon slices through even the most powerful of defenses.

Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp
Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp			

Weapon: Axe, heavy blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 damage per plus
Utility Power ✦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: The next attack you make with this weapon before the end of your next turn ignores the target's resistances. Until the end of the encounter, your attacks with this weapon ignore 5 points of any resistance.
Level 22 or 27: 10 points of any resistance.

Rissar, the Wedding Blade

Initially commissioned by crown prince Rhiigard (Rhiigard I, the Mourning King), *Rissar* is an exquisitely crafted short sword with a fortune's worth of gemstones set into its pommel and hilt. Rhiigard intended for the blade to be a wedding gift to Princess Aliia of Impiltur—one of many gifts he purchased, crafted, or had made for his betrothed. Upon hearing the news of her death, and twice afterward, Rhiigard briefly considered slaying himself on the sword's point, until he finally locked the weapon away deep in a royal vault. He placed it far enough from his sight to prevent it from reminding him of his grief and thus the temptation to end his life.

The Wedding Blade did not again see the light of day until the Year of the Emptied Lair (973 DR), when the contents of the vault in which it had been hidden were emptied and transferred to another chamber in the palace due to a rat infestation. The royal exchequer responsible for the transfer of the vault in question brought the blade to the attention of Bryntarth, who appropriated it for use during his wedding ceremony later that season, not knowing of its significance to his father. Rhiigard was appalled by its appearance in his son's hand, to say nothing of the most important of court ceremonies: the marriage of a crown prince. To save face, and to mask his renewed grief, the king feigned pleasure at his son's discovery and proclaimed that from that moment forward all royal weddings would be sworn over the blade.

Rissar did not see use in swearing blood oaths until the reign of Pryntaler, who was notoriously fond of extracting blood oaths from his friends and vassals. It was Dhalmass who, in royal proclamation, decreed that the blood for any oaths sworn at court be drawn by *Rissar's* point.

Rissar is a +2 *gleaming short sword*.

Gleaming Weapon Level 9+ Uncommon

The blade of this weapon shines like liquid silver.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Axe, heavy blade, light blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 radiant damage per plus
Attack Power (Radiant) **✦ Daily** (No Action)

Trigger: You hit a creature with a melee attack using this weapon.
Effect: The creature takes 1d6 radiant damage, and it is blinded until the end of your next turn.
Level 14 or 19: 2d6 radiant damage.
Level 24 or 29: 3d6 radiant damage.

Symylazarr, Font of Honor

Symylazarr is a heavy hafted, broad-bladed war sword originally forged during the reign of Rhiiman the Glorious as a demonstration of the quality of weapon that the new steel works in Suzail could produce. Intended for display in one of the palace hallways, the sword bears an elaborate dragon's head pommel. Though lovely to look at, the blade's width and weight make it an unattractive weapon for actual fighting. Although it is not a comfortable weapon to wield, its blade is as sharp and deadly as when the sword was first forged.

The first time *Symylazarr* saw battle was nearly one hundred years after its forging, when Moriann (then prince) was attacked by an assassin while walking the halls of Faerlthann's Keep. Moriann would have died were it not for the quick thinking of a servant named Varanth. The young man tore the sword from the wall and swung wildly at the would-be killer, which caused thunder to rumble. The strike he dealt tore the assassin's belly open and caused a fatal wound. Moriann knighted Varanth on the spot, and the former servant went on to gain the title "Thundersword" among palace guards. In addition to his new title, Varanth was allowed to keep the blade, which hung awkwardly from his small frame.

Varanth became one of the prince's fast friends, particularly when, a few months after the attempt on Moriann's life, the prince had the throne thrust upon him. Although neither a capable warrior nor a tactician of any skill, young "Thundersword" was made a commander in the king's army, always closely attached to any honor guard escorting the king. When Cormyr came into conflict with the goblin kingdom of Hlundadim, Varanth was among the first to fall, and the king took up his friend's sword, carrying it into battle on many occasions, and losing it in the fray almost as often. It was after the third battlefield knighting of warriors who had saved his life that Moriann forsook the use of the blade in combat.

Despite its unlucky tendencies in battle, *Symylazarr* is still an impressive ceremonial blade, and Moriann employed it in every knighting and investiture until his death. Each oath of fealty and allegiance was sworn over the blade, and in honor of those houses that took up his cause against Hlundadim, he had stylized runes of each family's initial and seal engraved upon the blade.

When Moriann died at the feast to celebrate Cormyr's successes against Hlundadim, *Symylazarr* was still strapped to the flank of his horse, and the sword was nearly buried with him. Rayn, Varanth's youngest son (the only one of six to survive the goblin wars), protested, saying that since the sword was given to

his father, it was his right to do with it as he pleased. Tharyann acquiesced, wary of such a popular young knight's gaining support against him even before he had taken the throne. Rayn took the sword and left.

He returned to the palace a tenday later, after Tharyann had ascended. Laying *Symylazarr* at the king's feet, Rayn swore his fealty and service to the king and his line, and he was invested as Lord Thundersword for his loyalty.

Symylazarr officially entered the royal regalia after the crowning of Gantharla, who declared that from her reign onward it would be used for all knighting and oaths of fealty to the crown. Its use fell dormant during the Thronestrife, but was restored by Thargreve the Greater, who used it to reestablish the loyalty of all of Cormyr's noble houses.

Symylazarr is a *+3 thundering bastard sword*.

The Lost Blades

Still missing from the royal vaults and their proper shrine, *Ilbratha* and *Shiningbite* are honored in Cormyr's records as true pieces of the kingdom's regalia. Because both have been missing for centuries, the Dragon Throne would happily reward the finder of either of these weapons far beyond the value of the item.

Even more than the Four Swords, Cormyrean authorities are willing to negotiate for either of the Lost Blades. They will consider replacing the weapon with one of greater power from King Azoun's collection (which includes some uncommon and rare weapons of immense power), or duplicating the powers of *Ilbratha* or *Shiningbite* with rituals performed on another weapon of the bearer's choosing. If the sword was obtained by fighting traitors to the kingdom or from marauding humanoids, the Crown might even allow a wielder to carry the sword for a time, until—in the manner of Varanth—it is time to return it to Cormyr's rulers.

Ilbratha, Mistress of Battles

Forged at the behest of Crown Prince (and later king) Azoun I, this bronze short sword retains a fine edge even after many battles. To Cormyreans, the Mistress of Battles is a symbol of Azoun's victory over the armies of Shoon, and of the glory and bounty lost when his ship, *Valashar's Bane*, sank into the Lake of Dragons in the Year of the Wooded Altar (389 DR).

For more than nine centuries, *Ilbratha* was called Haalorth, the Heir's Blade. It was carried by the heir of the undersea elven kingdom of Eadraal, and known to the sea folk as the Warrior's Fang. Lost during the Twelfth Serôs War (1369 DR), *Ilbratha*, and any trace of the weapon, disappeared entirely with the falling of the Sea of Fallen Stars during the Spellplague.

If found, *Ilbratha* would be considered the property of the heirs of both Cormyr and Eadraal, and part of the regalia of both nations. Eadraal's royal line is broken since the ravages of the Spellplague, but Cormyr still seeks the Mistress of Battles, if half-heartedly.

Ilbratha is a *+2 leaping short sword*.

Leaping Weapon Level 8+ Uncommon

The blade seems light, as if it wants to jump away.

Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp
Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp			

Weapon: Any one-handed melee
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Attack Power ✦ Encounter (Standard Action)
Effect: You charge and can fly as part of the charge's movement. The number of squares you can fly equals the weapon's enhancement bonus.

Shiningbite, the Drake's Tooth

This once-simple longsword was discovered in the royal armories by a youthful Gantharla, who ordered it polished and its hilt replaced before she carried it into the western reaches of Cormyr against encroaching lizardfolk from the Tun and Farsea marshes. Its recrafting included the addition of two of the rear teeth of the dragon Eaerdynnansczyg, who is also called Eardynn ("ee-*ar*-din"), at the ends of the crossguard, lending the wyrm's power and some of its legend to the blade.

Twice *Shiningbite* was used by the warrior-queen to fell young dragons in the Stormhorns, but its magic was not nearly so useful in her campaign against the hill giants in the west, who slew Gantharla and her entire band of ranger-knights, then stripped the bodies of anything that looked useful—including the Drake's Tooth. Where the blade passed after the First-Queen's death is a mystery.

Shiningbite is a *+3 true dragonslayer longsword*.

About the Author

Brian Cortijo is a freelance game designer and fiction author who's been playing in the backroads and underhalls of Cormyr for years, and he is thrilled to bring some of that work to light. His thanks, as always, go out to Ed Greenwood, for the Realms, and for trusting him with the sandbox (and especially the shinier toys).

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The Sentinel Marshal

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I swear to uphold and defend the Code of Galifar with heart, mind, soul, and steel until Galifar is reunited and at peace. I swear to follow the Code and to administer it justly and impartially, without respect to wealth or position, throughout the Five Nations and beyond.

– Opening lines of the Sentinel Marshal oath

Hailing from an ancient line of warlords and mercenaries, Sentinel Marshals are the quintessential elite in law enforcement in Eberron. Contracted to pursue criminals across national borders and beyond into uncivilized realms, they are an international police force dispensed by House Deneith. The Sentinel Marshals hold a reputation of honor, courage, and neutrality unrivaled by traditional chivalric agencies. Where royal courts, churches, and noble houses produce knights sworn to feudal lords, House Deneith produces knights sworn to the immortal ideology of a vanished kingdom. Their devotion to justice is second to none.

The life of a Sentinel Marshal is far from easy, and even the men and women who meet its formidable standards seldom choose it. Most marshals travel constantly, work alone, and regularly cross blades with ruthless outlaws. More than mere soldiers of House Deneith, they are agents of justice and the law, warrior-diplomats who traverse physical and political hazards every day.

Sentinel Marshals aren't flawless in their actions. They are, however, expected to be.

History and Marshal Law

Nearly a thousand years ago, King Galifar III instructed the patriarch of House Deneith to form an elite order numbering no more than three hundred swords to assist the Galifar Guard in upholding the law. Further charged with bringing fugitives to justice, the Sentinel Marshals were assembled from the most venerated heirs of the house and became well known throughout the great kingdom. Many of these noble warriors were household names who others looked up to or feared.

Where House Deneith was Galifar's shield, the Sentinel Marshals had become its blazing sword, striking down enemies of the realm within and without. Upon the death of King Jarot in 894 YK and the dispute over his succession, House Deneith and the Marshals struggled to smother the sparks of war. But when bloodshed could not be quelled and the Last War raged in earnest, the Marshals turned their efforts to the conduct of the war and universal observance of the Galifar Code of Justice, hoping to restore order when the kingdom was reunited.

Galifar was not restored. Under the Treaty of Thronehold in 996 YK, which ended the century-long conflict, the Marshals retained their role as officers of the Code. They were granted the right to cross national boundaries—hard lines that now divided the continent—to enforce the laws of the Code and punish those who defied it.

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As a branch of the world's most powerful mercenary organization, the Sentinel Marshals operate by contract. Although they are authorized to enact justice beyond the auspices of the dragonmarked houses, enforcing the Code of Galifar and even the Korth Edicts, they are not above the law.

At first blush, Marshals—who are hired to capture or kill outlaws—might seem comparable to bounty hunters, but they live by an imperial oath and high moral standards. Yet Marshals are not expected to work for free; they might serve the ideals of justice, but the lords of Deneith earn lots of coin in the process.

Marshals cannot be hired for just any mission. Only proven criminals or malevolent monsters are pursued, and if there is any doubt as to the target's guilt, Marshals might be instructed to arrest, not slay, their quarry. They are enforcers hired to track down criminals, not to determine guilt or solve mysteries, and yet justice is not always so easily served. Sometimes it begets investigation, and many Marshals, becoming invested in their work, make an effort to look beyond the obvious or readily apparent.

Today, fewer than two hundred Sentinel Marshals exist. Only nine reside regularly in Sharn, the City of Towers, with three or four stationed in most major cities of Khorvaire at any given time. Their central offices are located in Sentinel Tower in the city of Karrlakton, and all Marshals inevitably return there to report, train, or receive new assignments.

Marshals and the Code

The jurisdiction of the Sentinel Marshals is extensive but not without limit. The Galifar Code of Justice recognizes and protects the twelve sovereign nations acknowledged by the Treaty of Thronehold. Beyond these lands—in places such as Droaam, the Shadow Marches, and Xen'drik—a Sentinel Marshal carries only as much authority as he or she can exert. For example, a Marshal has the right to apprehend a criminal in Stormreach if the crime was committed on Brelish soil, but the Marshal should expect no support from the Storm Lords.

The Code of Galifar includes laws that forbid murder, theft, assault, fraud, smuggling, dueling, the misuse of magic, and even treasure hunting without a letter of marque. Resisting arrest carries steep penalties, and Host save the criminal who dares to kill a Sentinel Marshal. The full wrath of the law will follow such a wrongdoer for life.

The Code does not protect all creatures. It does not cover criminals (who forfeit all rights), the undead, and citizens of nations not recognized by the Treaty of Thronehold. For example, slaying a shifter from Graywall in the city of Sharn carries no penalty. The killing is not considered murder in the eyes of the Code because Droaam is not a sovereign nation.

A Marshal's Career Path

Not everyone can become a Sentinel Marshal. Under normal circumstances, only blood members of House Deneith qualify. A dragonmark is not required, but those who possess one enjoy a measure of esteem that their peers must work harder to achieve.

An heir of Deneith who aspires to become a Marshal usually begins as a member of the Blademarks Guild, then transfers to the Defenders Guild. Exemplary performance in both of those services earns an applicant consideration as a full-fledged Sentinel Marshal. A proven soldier must demonstrate honor, obedience to the chain of command, and dedication to the Galifar Code of Justice. Exceptions to this career path can be made, but only with direct sponsorship by one of the ruling lords of Sentinel Tower. Ultimately, it is merit, not age or family connections, that determines a Marshal's status. All Sentinel Marshals report to the Lords Seneschal and, nominally, to Baron Breven.

Signs of Authority

A Sentinel Marshal is required to identify herself and her office when making an arrest. The uniform of a Marshal is a black or purple surcoat worn over armor. The cloth is sewn with silver thread and emblazoned with elements of the Deneith crest. Marshals are not required to wear this uniform at all times, but it's helpful when one needs to invoke one's authority.

For times out of uniform, each Marshal is issued an elaborate badge of office. For one, it might be a special document sealed in a metal case. For another, it might be a brooch displaying the chimera heads of the Deneith coat of arms and worn as a cloak pin.

When a Marshal has demonstrated exceptional service, her superiors might give her an honor blade. Honor blades represent the glory of House Deneith and the special veneration of the Sentinel Marshals. Such weapons are never sold, and a Sentinel Marshal who finds an honor blade in the possession of anyone other than a Marshal is required to recover it.

Sentinel Marshal Honor Blade **Level 5+ Rare**

Members of House Deneith recognize this bright blade as a badge of respect and a shield against enemies of the law.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade or light blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 damage per plus

Properties

- ✦ While holding this weapon, you gain an item bonus to initiative checks equal to the weapon's enhancement bonus.
- ✦ When you use this weapon to reduce a nonminion enemy to 0 hit points, you gain temporary hit points equal to 5 + the weapon's enhancement bonus.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Free Action)

Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack using this weapon.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against the enemy.

Adventuring Marshals

Sentinel Marshals undertake many types of missions and have many reasons to travel. They receive assignments within Deneith enclaves throughout Khorvaire and sometimes beyond, such as in the house's Stormreach enclave. Between missions, a Marshal's time is her own. She can travel with allies provided that she checks in at Deneith outposts whenever possible.

In times of crisis, Sentinel Marshals have the power to deputize worthy allies—especially other warriors or other members of House Deneith—to assist them. This title does not grant allies the full authority of a Sentinel Marshal, but it legitimizes their presence and recognizes their aid if the mission is later scrutinized. Depending on the circumstances, a Marshal's allies might be debriefed afterward, rewarded for their efforts, and asked to help again.

A typical assignment for a Sentinel Marshal is to find (and kill, if necessary) a known and dangerous criminal. Such criminals are usually of the worst sort—the ones who leave town, consort with unsavory fellow outlaws, make fiendish alliances, and don't play fair.

Sentinel Marshals are also special operatives, not just law officers. One might be asked to assist in a diplomatic mission to Droaam, seize a shipment of Xen'drik relics from pirates on the Thunder Sea, or save an Eldeen village from a dragon roused by the Lords of Dust.

Having a Sentinel Marshal in the party provides an excellent plot device for the DM. Marshals also receive pay and rewards for each job they take, which is a means for your DM to deliver treasure. Baron Breven d'Deneith might have special items in his vaults or connections that can be used to reveal where such items might be found.

The missions assigned to you, as an adventuring Marshal, are suitable for your skills and those of your known associates and regular deputies. If you are a rogue, you might be ordered to infiltrate a thieves' guild and slay the vampire lord that rules it. If you are a fighter, you might be sent to defeat an ettin terrorizing Breland's western borders.

You're not always on duty, so you can go on adventures that have nothing do with your house. Nor are you required to chase down a cutpurse in the streets or arrest a merchant you see committing fraud unless you've been hired to do so. Yet you retain the right to enact justice whenever you deem it necessary. Some Marshals are callous about their authority, enforcing the law only in certain cases or when they're required to do so. Others cannot stand idle when they witness even the pettiest crimes. It's up to you to decide where you fall on the spectrum of justice.

Remember that you don't have to kill every foe. Sometimes you're the good guy who drags the bad guys back to the city to face the music. But just as often, you need to be the judge, jury, and executioner who gets the job done by any means necessary. Usually, a fugitive's head is proof enough that he's no longer a threat.

New Theme: The Sentinel Marshal

The Sentinel Marshal character theme described here is a great way to incorporate the tenets and abilities of the Marshals into the campaign. If your DM allows the theme, you can use it to help define your character.

Often, someone who seeks and gains admission to the Marshals spends his or her first few levels serving as a Blademark mercenary or a bodyguard in the employ of the Defenders Guild. For such a character, full-fledged membership in the Marshals might not be attainable before he or she reaches the middle of the heroic tier.

That said, exceptions are possible. A 1st-level Sentinel Marshal in full standing probably has received special treatment, has strong family connections within House Deneith, and is dragonmarked. Such hasty advancement, though, could foster resentment among other Marshals and might present a roleplaying challenge.

Only humans can be blood members of House Deneith, so Sentinel Marshals are always human. But again, the DM can make exceptions. A character of another race, if a loyal and long-standing servant of House Deneith, or one that bears the Mark of Sentinel, can earn honorary membership in the Sentinel Marshals with the approval of Baron Breven. Of course, a nonhuman Marshal might be regarded as an outsider among her peers.

The Sentinel Marshal theme lends itself to characters who use the martial power source. Fighters, as skilled defenders able to go toe to toe with formidable enemies, are most common among Sentinel Marshals. Paladins, as defenders devoted to high ideals, also make excellent Marshals, although many struggle to balance their religious and secular duties. Rangers and rogues, trained to focus on a single quarry, are a good fit as well. Members of other classes, such as avengers and warlocks, are good at singling out specific foes and also work well as Marshals.

Starting Feature

Bearing the honor of House Deneith and the legacy of nearly a thousand years of tradition, you do not hesitate to invoke your authority. You fight for the glory of your house and the dream of a unified Galifar, which infuses your actions with confidence. When you attack, you do so with conviction.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks and Intimidate checks when the check's subject knows that you are a Sentinel Marshal and respects

or fears members of that group. (The DM decides if this bonus applies.)

You also gain the *marshal's interdiction* power.

Marshal's Interdiction Sentinel Marshal Utility

With a firm voice and a sure strike, you let your enemy know that it is subject to the full penalty of the law.

Encounter ✦ Fear
No Action **Special**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack.
Target: The enemy you hit
Effect: The target is immobilized until the end of your next turn. You also mark the target until you end your turn without hitting or missing it with an attack. In addition, you designate the enemy as your marshal's quarry until the end of the encounter.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Sentinel Marshals live on the hunt. You know how to look for signs of your prey everywhere, be it on the Talenta Plains or among the rabble on the dark streets of Sharn.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Insight checks and Perception checks.

Level 10 Feature

Sentinel Marshals are trained to defy adversity. As your reputation grows, so must your determination to defeat more perilous foes. With the eyes of House Deneith upon you, failure is not an option.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against effects your marshal's quarry imposes on you.

Optional Powers

Versatility is an asset, but to survive in your career, you need to become tougher and more persistent against dangerous criminals who flout the law.

Level 2 Utility Power

Sentinel Marshals see each foe as a stepping stone to the next and, ultimately, to their quarry. Once you're on the scent, your enemy can't elude you for long.

Marshal's Pursuit Sentinel Marshal Utility 2

When your target is in sight, you move quickly and with care.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the marshal's pursuit stance. Until the stance ends, you gain the following benefits.
- ✦ You gain a +2 power bonus to speed.
- ✦ You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against opportunity attacks that you provoke by moving.
- ✦ You can shift 1 square as a free action at the end of each of your turns, but this movement must place you closer to or the same distance from your marshal's quarry.

Level 6 Utility Power

Sentinel Marshals are not easily shaken. Whether your enemy uses force of arms or magic against you, you're ready for it.

Marshal's Resolve Sentinel Marshal Utility 6

While pressing the assault, you prepare for whatever your enemy throws at you.

Daily
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack.
Target: The enemy you hit
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against the target. If the target is your marshal's quarry, you also gain temporary hit points equal to your healing surge value.

Level 10 Utility Power

When you bring down a foe, the thrill of victory pushes you onward. Your fighting strength is renewed, as is your determination to give your enemies everything they deserve.

Marshal's Triumph Sentinel Marshal Utility 10

Your success renews your resolve to bring justice to your foes.

Daily ✦ Healing
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You reduce a nonminion enemy to 0 hit points.
Effect: You can spend a healing surge and make a saving throw against one effect that a save can end. If the enemy was your marshal's quarry, you also regain the use of *marshal's interdiction*.

About the Author

Jeff LaSala is a writer and editor of speculative fiction and a game designer. His first Eberron® novel, *The Darkwood Mask*, showcased his love for all things dark, monstrous, and masked. He usually dwells in the chthonic depths of New York City, imagining a world splintered into sorry hemispheres. At times, he perches like a gargoyle over jefflasala.com.

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DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

King Hanaksaman

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Kieran Yanner

The Road of Kings has never been a safe route, but the path between Urik and Raam is particularly treacherous. Even the great city-state of Yaramuke fell to the might of nearby Hamanu, thanks to the arrogance of its sorcerer-king, Sielba.

What few know is that Sielba was not the first sorcerer-king along that road to fall to Hamanu. That distinction goes to the twisted wretch known as King Hanaksaman, the First Ruler of Urik—or at least, that is what Hanaksaman claims.

At almost the midpoint between Urik and the route north to the ruins of Yaramuke, the Road of Kings passes through a stretch of small mountains and canyons. In one twisted canyon, so deep that only the faintest rays of the red sun reach down that far even at midday, lies a village of former slaves who swear fealty to their leader, Hanaksaman. These people call themselves the Exiles, and they live without fear of discovery in clay homes built into the canyon floor.

King Hanaksaman, as the Exiles call him, is a regal but weathered man who looks to be in his early fifties—practically an ancient age for the people of Athas. He wears an iron circlet on his head (truly a sign of royalty), and despite his tattered robes, he has an undeniable air of nobility. Yet the man has a cunning and sometimes cruel streak, nowhere better manifested than in the way he rules over his tribe. King Hanaksaman demands absolute obedience from those under his command.

Many travelers along the Road of Kings have been waylaid by the Exiles and dragged to their territory. Most of the captives who survive the experience are brought before King Hanaksaman for a grand audience, an event that is cause for excitement among tribe members. Audiences before the king play out more like trials, with Hanaksaman acting as the judge overseeing the fate of trespassers in his domain. These sessions are held in an open-topped building near the crest of the canyon, where Hanaksaman sits cloaked in shadows while those on trial kneel at the base of a shaft of burning sunlight. At these times, the king exhibits the worst kind of capriciousness, frequently sentencing a captive to a gruesome death merely for the amusement of the tribe. Few are pronounced innocent in this mockery of justice.

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Hanaksaman, Sorcerer-King?

If King Hanaksaman were simply a mad tyrant at the head of a tribe of slaves, he would be little different from all the other small warlords whose territories dot the harsh deserts of Athas. What sets him apart is a claim that seems ridiculous on the surface but that grows more plausible as it is examined: that "King Hanaksaman" is not just a tribal chieftain with delusions of grandeur but was once the sorcerer-king who ruled the city-state of Urik.

As Hanaksaman tells it, long ago Urik was under his control until his most trusted templar, Hamanu, rose up against him. A great battle ensued, and the king was driven out of Urik, forced into the desert. In the process, he was stripped of most of his powers, retaining only a tiny fraction of his might, which he now uses to run his kingdom in exile.

At first blush, King Hanaksaman's story seems like madness; no one who once had the power of a sorcerer-king could be reduced to the role of a minor tyrant of the wastes. Yet the former slaves under him believe his tale and have sworn to follow him to their deaths. Hanaksaman certainly rules over his tribe like a sorcerer-king, and the tales told by the few captives who escape from his clutches make listeners wonder just how ludicrous his claims really are.

The evidence in favor of his claim is far from conclusive, but it does make one think. First, Hanaksaman seems to be immortal, at least in terms of the natural progression of years. The Exiles claim that he has not aged a day in generations. Some years ago, Veiled Alliance agents tried to insinuate themselves into the tribe to verify these claims, and they found no indication that the king was anything but immortal. Before the infiltrators were discovered, they smuggled out messages supporting a theory that Hanaksaman was not a former sorcerer-king but rather had been transformed into a living phylactery for Hamanu. To this day, the Veiled Alliance believes that Hamanu planted memories into Hanaksaman's mind to make him think he was once a sorcerer-king, so that no one would question how he was able to go on living for so many years. The tribal leader would be the perfect vessel for Hamanu's immortality: living in exile, guarded by loyal slaves, and so unlike any other phylactery that no one would think to suspect the truth.

Furthermore, King Hanaksaman has extensive knowledge of arcane magic and psionics, despite never having shown any ability to use either one. His knowledge seems purely academic, not practical, which would make sense if his claim of being stripped of his power, but not his memories, were true. Of course, academic knowledge of magic and psionics is not a sign of being a sorcerer-king; many templars and scholars in the city-states have such knowledge. Regardless, Hanaksaman is aware of great arcane secrets, and more than one psionic master has attempted to gain access to the tribe leader to pry the knowledge from his mind. So far, no one has succeeded in getting close enough.

Another point in favor of the king's tale is his apparent connection to Hamanu. Hanaksaman has a burning hatred for the Lion of Urik and seems to know personal information about the sorcerer-king, including his habits and the way he thinks. Of course, the tribal leader could simply be inventing much of his so-called knowledge. But if he truly does know Hamanu so well, then someone who turns Hanaksaman into an ally would have a huge advantage in striking a blow against the ruler of Urik.

A final piece of evidence in his favor is the fact that Hanaksaman runs his tribe much as a sorcerer-king rules a city-state, including a staff of lieutenants whom he calls templars. Some of the information gathered by the Veiled Alliance suggests that one or more of these lieutenants might actually be a templar from another city-state, sent to infiltrate the tribe and spy on Hanaksaman—or, perhaps, to watch over and safeguard him. Revealing any spies in the midst of the Exiles would be a good way to earn the king's gratitude (assuming that the perpetrator survives the attempt).

The Exiles

The people who serve Hanaksaman call themselves the Exiles simply because that is what they are. Some were driven out of Urik, but most are former slaves who escaped from cities along the Road of Kings. Hanaksaman's most loyal servants follow him in anticipation of the day when they will march upon Urik and slay Hamanu, reclaiming their rightful place as the keepers of the city-state. However, generations of normal life spans have come and gone with little progress toward this goal, and even among the most faithful, some have begun to doubt whether their glorious revolution will ever come to fruition.

Exile Soldier	**Level 7 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 300
HP 83; **Bloodied** 41	**Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** +4
Speed 6	

Standard Actions

Bone Carrikal (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.
Effect: If the target leaves a square adjacent to the soldier before the end of the soldier's next turn, the soldier can deal 7 damage to the target as an opportunity action.

Dejada (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Fight to the Last (healing, weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.
Effect: The soldier regains 2d6 hit points for each enemy it hit.

Triggered Actions

For the King! ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the soldier hits one of the soldier's allies with a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The attack hits the soldier instead. After the attack is resolved, the soldier uses *bone carrikal* against the triggering enemy as a free action.

Str 17 (+6)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 19 (+7)	**Int** 9 (+2)	**Cha** 10 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, bone carrikal, dejada, 10 small stones

About the Author

Rodney Thompson, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, is a designer for Dungeons & Dragons R&D at Wizards of the Coast. His credits for the D&D game include the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog™*, *Monster Vault™*, and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild™*.

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EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

Vadallia and Cardaen

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Ania Mohrbacher

No creature could match the Titan King Cul'sir in power or greed. His strength was immeasurable. He knew one thousand spells and held the treasures of a continent in his vaults, and yet he still hungered for more. He held the elves in his thrall, yet some were sly enough to slip through his fingers and find refuge in the wilds. Many of these free people wished to flee as fast and as far as possible from the Titan King, but there was one who stopped their flight and rallied them together: Vadallia.

Vadallia was born in the saddle and learned the tongue of horses before she learned our own. No elf understood the ways of war as she did. She wielded soldiers as a master wields a blade. One of her eyes was a diamond, through which she could see glimmers of the future. In this way she knew that the elves would never see peace while Cul'sir still lived, and that no one clan could stand against him alone. Such was her passion that she united the Taeri and the Elorrenthi, and brought Shol and Thuranni to one table. Time and again she clashed with Cul'sir and his host, testing the king and learning his strength. She knew she could goad him to meet her on the battlefield . . . but she also knew that for all the skill of her warriors, steel alone could not match the magic of the giants.

At that time, the elves were still slaves of the giants. But there was magic in their blood, a potential that the giants could not match . . . and when Cul'sir saw that potential in a slave, he raised him as one of his own. So it was with Cardaen. He was born in a high tower and Cul'sir made sure Cardaen's feet never touched the ground. Cardaen crafted mystic weapons for the giants, never knowing that they were used against his own kind. He cared only for magic—until he met Vadallia. The Queen of Swords caught a glimpse of Cardaen through her crystal eye and knew that his magic could turn the tide of the war. And so she led her band into the heart of Cul'sir's Throne and carried the wizard away with her. It was a dangerous move, and it allowed Cul'sir to place a scrying trace upon Vadallia. The giant then assembled his army for war.

As she prepared for battle, Vadallia urged Cardaen to fight at her side. Though her words touched his heart, Cardaen still thought of the giants as his kin instead of his captors, and he refused to raise his hand against them. Vadallia pleaded with him, telling him that his true people needed him, and still he resisted. In the end Vadallia fought the battle without him, while he watched from afar. Her warriors battled without fear, and her strategies were brilliant. Drow and giant fell before the united clans. Then

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Cul'sir unleashed a terrible weapon, a lingering curse that rotted the bones within the body. It was a spell Cardaen had created, and when he saw it used and realized the suffering he had brought to his own kind, he was filled with horror. He took to the battlefield and shattered the curse. His fury lent him strength, and he blunted every spell the giants threw against him. For the first time in his life, the Titan King knew fear; he fled the battlefield, and his host was scattered to the far corners of the earth. Yet Cardaen's revelation had come too late for Vadallia. He found her on the battlefield, mortally wounded by the curse he had made. No one knows what words passed between them before she died; when he left the battlefield there were tears on his cheeks, and he held her crystal eye in his hand. From that day forward he was a force for vengeance, and the giants feared his name.

When Aeren led the elves to their haven, Cardaen remained behind. He remembered Vadallia's vision—that the elves would never see peace while Cul'sir still lived. His final fate remains a mystery. But by the time the elves reached Aeren's Rest, Cul'sir had fallen . . . and so their future was secured.

—Jaeskal Elorrenthi d'Phiarlan,
at the coronation of High King Shaeras Vadallia

The lives of the Tairnadal elves are shaped by those of their patron ancestors. When an elf comes of age, the Keepers of the Past read the signs to determine which of the patron ancestors has laid claim to the child. From that point forward it is the sacred duty of the child to become the living avatar of the fallen champion, mastering his or her skills and living by her code. The people of the Five Nations know little about the Tairnadal, and their general assumptions often don't make sense. Ask ten people in Sharn, and you'll hear that the Valenar are bloodthirsty brutes who love to pillage the weak; that they seek glory in battle and won't fight a weaker foe; that they are bound by a strict code of honor; that they have no honor; that every Valenar is bound to a horse; and so on. In fact, no one rule applies to every Tairnadal, for every ancestor demands a different role of his or her descendants. A child chosen by Maelian Steelweaver will spend his or her days forging swords instead of wielding them. One chosen by Silence will spend life in the shadows, never touching a horse. War is the common thread that unites the Tairnadal, because the wars against giants, dragons, and goblins were what produced these legendary heroes. As such, the Tairnadal seek conflicts that will let them face the same odds and fight in the same style as their ancestors. Nowadays a child of Vadallia can't fight giants, because the Cul'sir Dominion has fallen, but he or she must search for a foe that is equally challenging and then defeat it in the same way Vadallia would, thus creating new legends in Vadallia's name.

Any time you create a Tairnadal character, you should consider his or her patron ancestor. What was the ancestor famous for? What were the ancestor's deeds or talents? What enemies did the ancestor fight, and what were his or her preferred tactics? Bear in mind that the ancestor chooses the elf, not the other way around; some ancestors were known for their cruelty, or might have other unappealing traits. A Tairnadal elf is expected to embody every aspect of his or her ancestor, both positive and negative. And it is the goal of each elf to become the vessel through which that ancestor truly lives again.

Vadallia and Cardaen are examples of patron ancestors, and the following sections describe what it means to follow in their footsteps. Use these as models when creating other ancestors. What drove the ancestors in battle? What connections did they have to other heroes? How did they die?

Also rememeber that although each Tairnadal emulates his or her patron, each can interpret the ancestor's life in different ways. Three individual Valenar warlords chosen by Vadallia might each be a passionate, inspiring leader driven to do what's best for the Tairnadal—but they might have different ideas of what the "best" is. The patron ancestor inspires the elf—but each Valenar remains a unique individual.

HISTORY LESSONS

The Tairnadal are well versed in the histories of their heroes. The tale presented at the start of the article is common knowledge for any Tairnadal elf chosen by Cardaen or Vadallia. For any other Tairnadal elf, a DC 10 History check will provide this information. (This check is DC 20 for any other elf, and DC 25 for a character of another race.)

The elves of Valenar are Tairnadal elves. However, other Tairnadal elves still live on the island of Aerenal, including young and other noncombatants. The Host of Valenar is a Tairnadal army that holds territory in Khorvaire, but Aerenal is their homeland.

Vadallia's Chosen

Vadallia was one of the finest warlords of the Age of Giants. She was a gifted equestrian and a deadly warrior, but her greatest talents were her grasp of strategy and her ability to inspire others. She united rival clans and convinced stubborn heroes to join together beneath her banner. She was driven by her passion and her love of the elven people, yet her love was tempered by a lack of compassion for any other creature except her horse.

Vadallia was utterly ruthless when it came to acquiring essential weapons, magic, and other treasures that her people needed to survive; though the giants were her true foe, she frequently led raids against the other inhabitants of Xen'drik. She was always prepared to take personal risks and to make sacrifices if they would help her people; as an

example of such behavior, it's said she tore out her own eye to gain the gift of prophecy.

Children chosen by Vadallia must learn to ride and to wield the double scimitar, but they focus on tactics, history, and the broader arts of war. Some of Vadallia's chosen seek to emulate her dedication to protecting her people, and these elves become cavaliers. Others become warlords and marshals. War bands led by one of Vadallia's chosen often press deep into hostile territory; however, Vadallia's children are driven by a vision of what's good for the Tairnadal as a whole, and their raids have a purpose beyond simple pillage. Even though many of Vadallia's chosen share her love of the elves, a few exhibit this passion in a different way; a Valenar adventurer might give this devotion to his adopted family of adventurers, provided the group's goals will ultimately help the elves.

Cardaen's Chosen

Cardaen was an arcane prodigy, raised by giants and taught to love magic above all else. In his early life, he was completely absorbed with study. He had no interest in how the rituals he crafted were used; he simply sought to push the laws of magic to their limits. After Vadallia's death, he realized that magic was pointless if it did not have purpose. He dedicated his life to vengeance, hunting down and punishing those who brought suffering to his people.

Tairnadal chosen by Cardaen invariably develop remarkable arcane talent. Elves who emulate Cardaen's early life become wizards, pursuing perfection of the magical arts to the exclusion of other goals. Some are cold and dispassionate; others take joy in the study of the arcane, seeing beauty in spellcraft that cannot be found in the natural world. Elves who follow his path of vengeance might be wizards, sorcerers, or swordmages; they are grim and stoic, pursuing their vengeance at any cost. Some say that to truly follow his path, one must begin with an innocent love of magic and be driven to vengeance by a terrible loss.

To date, Cardaen has never produced an artificer, and an artificer who follows this path would stand out among his or her kin.

Adventure Hooks

Patron ancestors should play a role in any encounter with Valenar or other Tairnadal. If a war band is led by one of Vadallia's chosen, consider what that leader's purpose might be, and why is this battle in particular is worth fighting? In addition, Vadallia was a superb tactician, and her chosen will act with that same cunning. No child of Vadallia will act without thought or be driven by fury alone. If a player character is chosen by Cardaen or Vadallia, he or she might find a rival in another who follows the same path, or feel a romantic attraction to an elf who follows the counterpart of his spirit.

Dungeon Raid! Vadallia's chosen are fearless in pursuit of victory for their war bands and their people, and in obtaining any treasure or object that might aid them in this quest. If adventurers explore a dungeon in search of a powerful relic, they might encounter a war band already searching for the same object. Alternatively, a Valenar band could strike deep into Karrnath and seize a mystic weapon from a Karrnathi arsenal. Can the heroes recover the artifact, and if so, should they return it to Kaius or destroy it?

Against the Crown: Shaeras Vadallia is the High King of Valenar, and it was his devotion to his ancestor that led him to found his nation. He believes that his actions are in the best interests of Tairnadal. However, an adventurer who follows Vadallia's path could decide that Shaeras is misguided and that his actions are a blight on Vadallia's memory. Can the hero gain enough skill and strength to challenge the High King and claim the Darkwood Crown?

Vadallia's Eye: Legends say that Vadallia had a diamond eye that granted her visions of the future. The eye passed to Cardaen, and it was lost when the dragons laid waste to Xen'drik. Recovering the Eye would be a great triumph for any of Vadallia's chosen, but it would certainly create tension between the bearer and the High King.

Cardaen's Vengeance: The chosen of Cardaen are driven by vengeance. One of Cardaen's chosen might seek to avenge crimes against the elves; war bands led by Cardaen's chosen hunt down those who have wronged the elves, and adventurers who have crossed the Valenar could run afoul of such a group. A Valenar adventurer who follows Cardaen's path could be approached by a friend from his youth and called upon to avenge an injustice against the race. Of course, Cardaen's chosen don't have to limit their vengeance to crimes against the elves; an adventurer would seek to avenge any harm that comes to his allies.

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron® campaign setting and the designer of the card game *Gloom*. He owns a Valenar pug named Mister Pants, whose heroic ancestor once defeated five sabertoothed tigers before breakfast.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

A Surprising Vintage

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by S.C. Watson

Bottles of new wine from one particular vineyard in Tethyr are yielding up more than just a refreshing drink. The bottoms of more than a few bottles have revealed gold rings, small gems, ornate keys and even sets of lockpicks. Was a bottler bored? Spiteful? Trying to get rid of incriminating loot? Or did an attempt to quietly smuggle a cache of treasure to a single destination go terribly awry?

Strange Contents

Over the last three decades, vintner Oraundas Haeltower rose from being one farmer among hundreds in Tethyr bottling "roughslake" wine for his own and local consumption to the largest purveyor of table wine in the Sword Coast. Haeltower wines are found in so many inn and eatery cellars because they are cheap, smooth, pleasantly nondescript drinkables available by the bottle or the cask. Most Haeltower wines are "sour whites," so called because they are dry and have a nutty or salty aftertaste. However, Haeltower's recently introduced sweet "Coast Fanfare" vintages have been very popular, and he has long made a few pale red wines he's very proud of, and that sell mainly to those who can't afford the better, more robust reds favored by wealthy and noble drinkers.

The vast Haeltower vineyards lie north and east of Vineshade in the Purple Hills (County Vintor) of coastal Tethyr. Down the years, Oraundas Haeltower mastered the friendly art of buying out neighbors and rivals without making lasting foes. These days, locally and along the Sword Coast, he's respected as a fair trader and a successful vintner—even if those who consider their tastes in wine discerning tend to decry his offerings as "drinkable but forgettable throatquench" rather than a vintage worth cellaring and savoring. The reliable season-after-season abundance, low prices, consistency, and hardiness (they travel and cellar well) of his wines have made them swiftly popular with innkeepers, city shopkeepers, and eatery owners alike, on the Sword Coast and

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increasingly east through the Heartlands, as far as Sembia.

The Haeltower family works the vineyards and produces the wine, sending it forth in smallkegs[1] and wagon-casks. While it's usual for valuable liqueurs to be bottled where they are produced (a custom introduced and reinforced by monastic communities who derive income from being the sole source of several fiery pear- and almond-based drinks, sold in small, distinctive, sturdy glass flasks), wine is transported in smallkegs or larger casks that are tapped to fill carafes in taverns, inns, and eateries as needed, or bottled for local sale by a shop. The popularity of Haeltower vintages caused a surge in purchases from Vineshade shops; caravan traders normally loath to buy breakable bottles repeatedly bought everything available. Not wanting to relinquish their lucrative share of this sudden wave of sales by directing traders to the Haeltower vineyards, the shops bought more casks and filled more bottles, so distant buyers came to expect their favorite Haeltower vintages to arrive in bottles of dark green and brown glass.

Bottles which, this year, have yielded up some astonishing finds.

In Athkatla, Waterdeep, and Scornubel, more than a dozen plain but large and heavy gold finger rings were found at the bottom of Haeltower bottles. In Baldur's Gate, Athkatla, Silverymoon, and Waterdeep, small gems (moonstones, emeralds, sapphires, and citrines, both cabochon and faceted) turned up in Haeltower dregs. Three bottles in widely separated locales yielded astonishingly large and ornate keys—at least one of which was of a metal and condition that ruined the wine in the bottle. These keys were not new, and were each as long as a small man's hand and of elaborate style, obviously linked to important or expensive doors.[2] Three stranger finds were also reported: two "like new" sets of lockpicks of the finest Lantanna make (of exotic metals and joined to a common ring with braided wires), and a warding charm meant to keep undead at bay that is popular with backcountry people across the Heartlands and Sword Coast: a human fingerbone engraved with the word "Vauntras," which means "Keep from me" or "Keep back" in Thorass (Old Common).

Some finders angrily confronted traders, shopkeepers, or hosts who'd sold them the wines, and a few reported what was at the bottom of their bottles to a local temple or the local watch. As a result, word swiftly spread, warming the ears of Tethyrian factors (trade agents) and envoys before it reached any of the Haeltowers. These darkening rumors caused a brief souring in popularity of Haeltower vintages, but sales then surged again because guilds in a dozen cities decided to buy any the Haeltower wines they could and decant them in search of treasure, then resell the wine for a profit regardless of what did or didn't turn up in their bottles.

By then, the factors and envoys had made reports to Faerntarn—where the Queen reacted with brisk decisiveness.

Storl Thammuraster Investigates

The Queen's military reach, from Darromar across vast Tethyr, can be tenuous from time to time and place to place, but she maintains a vast network of eyes and ears (both casual local spies and skilled, traveling ones) and a small but effective force of formal Crown Investigators.

One such "pouncehawk"[3] is a tall, gaunt, balding, sharp-featured and sharper-tongued man by the name of Storl Thammuraster, of very old Tethyrian bloodlines and a fierce dedication to uncovering deceit and intrigue. He was commanded to "lay bare the truth behind these wine-tainting objects, and stop them being placed in bottles forthwith"—and intended to do that, by yestereve if he could. Thammuraster began without warning, descending on the bottling shops of Vineshade like a proverbial hungry, swooping dragon. He was astonished to find nothing amiss, and without delay turned to scour the vineyards, prying into the sordid daily secrets of every last Haeltower with an aggression that at first frightened and then enraged Oraundas Haeltower and the other elder Haeltowers.

They complained forthwith to the Crown (receiving, by all accounts, nothing but silence in reply), and the shopkeepers of Vineshade responded more furiously: at least two anonymously hired bands of slayers to "remove" Thammuraster.

Their failures were spectacular—it seems Crown Investigators are on occasion watched over by capable fighting forces working for the Crown. The shopkeepers' audacity goaded Thammuraster to pry into their business dealings all the more energetically. For two solid tendays, he searched and interrogated, dispensing with stealth and discretion entirely, and became cordially hated in Vineshade. Again he found nothing illicit, beyond a little suspected "thinning" (watering of wine to make it go further). Thammuraster is a stubborn man, but not a foolish one; he privately concluded Haeltower bottles were being opened and tampered with further along the supply chain, after a trading company had transported them from Vineshade.

The spate of curious findings likely arose because someone made a mistake, selling certain bottles that instead should have gone to a particular destination, with the hidden contents intended for a sole recipient, an easily made error if the bottles weren't carefully segregated or marked.

But how to find that mark? Thammuraster's investigations confirmed the obvious. Tethyrian-made wine bottles can readily be identified by makers' marks scratched into their bases, but bottlers remain anonymous . . . and there isn't anything to stop someone from unsealing a bottle, doing something with its contents, and resealing it. All that's needed are vessels

to hold the wine, corks, a ready supply of the right sort and hue of wax, and (forged) stamps to make the right designs on the new wax. The original, broken wax seals can be melted and added into the supply of wax for the new seals.

A Frustrating Hunt

Thammuraster wondered how, from among literally thousands of Vineshade bottling shop sales, he could possibly identify which buyer was tampering with bottles once they left town in merchant wagons and caravans. Was it an initial purchaser of bottles, or a later buyer from one of the caravan traders? And what else—weapons, or magic, or perhaps poison—was being smuggled this way? Were dark cabals involved, perhaps fell, monstrous hands of the Underdark? He reported these concerns to the Crown, in case his deeper investigations ended his life before he could uncover the truth or tender such warnings, and took the unusual step of asking an adventuring mage for help.

Fortunately for Thammuraster, the wizard he happened to approach loved Haeltower wine and was eager to offer assistance for nominal fees. Amaront of Selgaunt was young, energetic, and had a hobby of trying to craft new spells that used gemstones as foci (that is, magic that would emanate from a jewel rather than the caster, or that could be deflected by particular gems so those bearing them would be excluded from such a spell's area of effect). Amaront had thus far managed to alter cantrips causing brief localized sounds and glows—but these would serve, if he could cast them close enough to full Haeltower bottles, to identify bottles that held gems inside the wine by causing the gems to glow or emit a soaring musical tone. He was also able to magically alter Thammuraster's appearance for short periods, so the two of them could approach caravan traders without being immediately recognized as Tethyrian agents.

Acting on years of reports about usual trade routes and popular markets, the unlikely pair embarked on a long summer of trying to buy a few Haeltower bottles here and a few there. They knew word would spread about them, likely resulting in either the tampered bottles being kept from them or traps arranged for them, so they hoped to swiftly find gems in bottles before their deceptions were uncovered. They were disappointed.

After a month of searching, traders began to avoid them, wine merchants were being murdered or going missing shortly before the two visited their shops, and warehouse crates of bottled wine were being moved around to elude their examinations. A frustrated Amaront hit upon the notion of hiring a more powerful wizard to cast magic in concert with his gem-focal cantrips, so any gem within range wouldn't sing or glow—it would explode.

Thammuraster reluctantly agreed to this plan and identified a trader of whom he was suspicious and a wizard (Onth Tarralus of Silverymoon) he hoped had no connection to the smuggling ring. The attempt was made . . . and no explosions occurred.

Running low on funds and judging their effectiveness as investigators had run out, Thammuraster decided to spend two tendays on a whirlwind tour of select markets to cast gemblasting spells in each of them. Their very first visit severely damaged Daranthur's Hall[4] in Athkatla, the capital of Amn, with a shattering series of explosions that brought down the roof, killed dozens of traders and shoppers in a hail of glass shards, and severely wounded Amaront.

Conspiracy Unmasked

Fearing high-level Amnian involvement in the smuggling might mean their imminent deaths, Onth Tarralus called in some favors, and no fewer than four Athkatlan wizards—normally his rivals—brought their talents to his service, swiftly exposing a thieving and smuggling ring in the city run by three rising local merchant families: the Aerlonds, Kravalondurs, and the Morornds.

The hasty flights of these families from the realm were as swift as Amn's complaint to Tethyr about Thammuraster's presence and activities within its borders—a complaint Thammuraster delivered to his Queen personally, along with such ample gifts of gold from Amn that it took three wagons to carry. A fourth wagon carried four large strongchests of gems, a quiet personal Amnian reward for Storl Thammuraster. He shared them with both mages, selling his share for coins no wizard could make explode, and which he promptly used to buy several Tethyrian vineyards of his own.

It remains to be seen if Thammuraster has managed to purchase his own "happily ever after." There have been at least six recent attempts on his life—and the Aerlonds, Kravalondurs, and the Morornds collectively have enough coin to hire a *lot* of assassins.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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Endnotes

1. A "smallkeg" is a type of small wooden cask rather than a specific size—the term means a container an average man can comfortably carry when full, without assistance or a cart. Smallkegs are, in our real-world measurements, about sixteen inches long, and of the classical "fat middle, tapering to the ends" shape. They have stout ends to prevent splitting in a "usual" fall (dropped from the height of a man's chest onto hard cobbles), and either have rope end-handles or are encased in a netlike rope "haul-net" framework for easy handling. Smallkegs have a bung-hole at their widest point, plugged with a simple cork and sealed with wax. Whoever taps the keg inserts a spigot, if they have one, or if not, pulls the stopper and lifts and tilts the keg to pour. In a tavern brawl, smallkegs make handy and formidable missiles for those strong enough to hurl them.

2. One single key has since been positively matched with its door: the front door of an Athkatlan mansion belonging to a fabulously wealthy ivory and exotic woods trader (and sculptor) named Narondror Glythlont. This rude dandy and local socialite has recently been implicated in drug trading and smuggling. It's not known if his key was stolen and put into a Haeltower bottle as a comment on Glythlont's deeds, to bring attention on him, or for other reasons entirely.

3. A "pouncehawk" is any investigator or spy who has government authority, the power to arrest, or both. It's a term of respect or jovial commentary rather than a term of derision. "Some pouncehawk'll get you!" is a friendly warning of too-public illicit behavior.

4. Daranthur's Hall has since been rebuilt and is as busy as ever. It was one of the first, and remains one of the most exclusive (due to its small size and prime downtown location) of the "shared-roof" markets that are now increasingly popular in Amn.

Outsourced

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

About ten years ago a friend asked if I would attend a Weight Watchers open house meeting with her. Naturally I was offended. *Me*? What was she implying? Swallowing my pride (and the last four Butterfinger bars I hid in my purse, in case the Weight Watchers commandos did a full search upon arrival), I went. For *moral support*. Now, after ten years and five pounds (give or take twenty-five), I'm still a loyal member. I'm even the company coordinator for our at-work meetings.

Weight Watchers works for me (and Charles Barkley). I know exactly how many strides per minute on the elliptical I need to log to cancel out those IPA's I plan to knock back at dinner. My brain is full of numbers dedicated to the point values of eleven almonds and half a cup of Greek yogurt.

And yet, Weight Watchers has gone and changed the plan—*my* plan—at least three times since I've been on it. It's a big deal when this happens. Like, a *really* big deal. I've actually seen tears in meetings when new point values were introduced. (The latest change actually dropped the point value of white wine from 4 to 3, so no complaining there!) There is definitely a sentiment of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

I admit—I resisted the changes. I was managing just fine with *this* program, thank you very much. But in the back of my mind I heard a voice assuring me that they weren't messing things up and pissing off a bunch of loyal members just because the social media guy is bored and needs a project before his next performance review. They have to have some idea of what they're doing, right? So I tentatively, grudgingly switched. And each time, much to my dismay, it worked. Stupid science.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is, I know you're excited about the future of D&D—and I know some of you are skeptical, too.

Personally, I am excited about the new iteration since I'll get the chance to be intimately involved in helping to bring a new version of the game to light. And so will you, because community feedback is an integral part of the process.

A little bit of skepticism is expected this early in the game. I mean, the idea of "one system to unite them all" sounds wonderful in theory. But is it possible? To hear Mike and Monte talk about it, the answer is a resounding yes. I've heard the pitch more times than I've seen every episode of *Sex and the City* (that's . . . *a lot*) and I'm becoming more inspired by it than by Carrie Bradshaw's shoe collection. (That's . . . a lie.) But I will say that if Mike Mearls wanted to sell me a time-share in downtown Detroit, I'd probably buy it.

However . . .

I do have one small grievance about this whole thing.

After years of my griping, bribing, micromanaging, monitoring, demanding, debating, and making things magic once again, my role of Player-in-Chief

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has been outsourced. Bitter? Nope! Why would I be? Just because *now* R&D has an open door for feedback? Because I endured years of eye-rolling, pretend meetings, and "there, there" pats on the head while trying to make D&D a safer place for all of you, and my only reward is to get tossed aside like a *wand of magic missile* with no charges left? Because, unbeknownst to me, my role as Player-in-Chief was clearly so important that one person couldn't be trusted with that much responsibility, and R&D had to open the job up to the whole D&D community? *Why would I be bitter???*

It's cool. I hope you all enjoy your new position, which can be found at the end of the road I paved for you. Go forth and give R&D your feedback. Lots of it. And don't you spend one minute worrying about me, your loyal and dogged former Player-in-Chief. I've created some new roles that fit my talents quite well.

Magic User Lobbyist

There's a reason I like playing a wizard—I like blowing things up. I like poofing fireballs out of thin air and socking a gaggle of my opponents in their collective face. I like conjuring up a storm of deadly arrows, raining them down on your unsuspecting head, and turning the gravelly ground beneath your feet into a tiny forest of pockmarked DEATH. I cannot do those things in real life. I've tried. These are the things I relish about being a wizard.

I do not run up to goblins and punch them in the face. I do not try to disarm traps or open locked doors. I am not proficient with a bow and arrow. I know my place in the party. So why do some people who never so much as attended a kegger at a magic academy have the ability to do cool magical stuff? (Fighter, I'm talking to you!) I can't help but be reminded of stories about every kid who tries out gets on the team. Or no matter what place you come in, you get a trophy. No. This is not fair. I was a complete athletic failure and lack the accolades to prove it. That's how it should be. Just like the party's fighter should be fine with good old-fashioned fists of fury. Must you be able to cast spells too?

I don't want to be pushy here, but let's be honest. Wizards are the heart of the party. Let them shine like the stars they were meant to be.

Director of Animal Amalgamation

The only thing better than one animal is two animals, so naturally I love owlbears. They're adorable and apparently very contentious, because every time I bring them up, everyone in R&D gets all red-faced and shouty and starts spouting off about how a "real owlbear" should have a hawk-beak, or feathery talons, or the ability to turn its head 360 degrees, or even that it shouldn't even exist in the D&D universe. Sheesh! Everyone has an opinion on that, and they all seem to be different. I could clear that up. I could tell them definitively that owlbears are combinations of Winnie the Pooh and his friendly neighborhood condescending know-it-all, Owl. Picture a feathery Pooh Bear body with Owl's head, Pooh's ears, Owl's feet, and of course Pooh's red shirt. Oh, and they can fly.

Sure, zombies and mummies and vampires used to be cool. But why borrow from other lore when D&D is chock full of iconic beasties? Beholders, bulettes, rust monsters. These are all inherently D&D, and I say we go back to the drawing board—literally—and make more, more, MORE animal combos. In fact, I'd like to offer my services in designing them. I could dedicate myself to leading the Animal Amalgamation Think Tank. I'm constantly looking for new ideas already. One Saturday, Bart and I went to the zoo and made our way to Gertie the Hippo's exhibit. There was a man, a volunteer, who came all the way from Tanzania to share his intimate knowledge of the mighty "river horse."

"My family was killed by hippopotamuses," he casually told us. "They capsized the boat my family was fishing on and ate them all."

"Oh. Thank you for the information, sir," we said, slowly backing away. "Have a nice day."

Awful story but, as Director of D&D Animal Amalgamation, I would be able to see it as an inspirational nugget the Universe bestowed upon me. How would you like to encounter a Cheetapotamus—a giant of a beast combining the super strength and sheer girth of a hippo with the agility and speed of a cheetah? There, my friend, you have one deadly but surprisingly graceful stampede.

But wait—I have more!

What about the deadly Porcucorn, who can create a 20-foot burst filled with poisonous quills . . . OR use its abnormally long horn like a pole vaulter (because it happens to be made of flexible fiberglass) to fling its quills at opponents three times—no, *thirty* times—its regular normal range. Good luck dodging that.

Animals that can thrive under water as well as on land have it made. But walruses are so big and cumbersome they can't move quickly, and seals are way too lazy. Penguins are too cute to be feared . . . unless they use their cuteness as a weapon. What about pairing one up with a great white shark? Oh, sure, sharks are frightening in the water—where they belong—but imagine walking into a dungeon and finding one guarding an ancient artifact. And why stop at two animals? Why not throw in an orangutan? There's no escaping the Pengsharkutan!

Master Dungeon Master

We all know I have a complicated relationship with Dungeon Masters. I love them because I have no game without them, but I loathe them because of the power they wield over me. (I have a similar relationship with *The Real Housewives*.) DMs are a wily bunch. Basically they're the enactors of R&D's maniac

ideas. That's a lot of power to be given with very little supervision.

During our weekly lunch game, Chris Lindsay, our DM, pulled one of his obnoxious stunts of claiming that no one in the party heard the monster trotting up behind us and therefore we all suffered great damage at the hands of a sneak attack.

"Actually," I interrupted, "I have a pretty high Perception, and I happened to be looking *behind* me at the time, so I think I did see the monster."

The DM is assumed to know a lot. That I accept. But there have to be things a player is assumed to know too, like which way her head was turned.

Chris did not accept my claim. And just to prove it, he made the monster attack me first. I should note that he made this decision *after* he made his first attack roll—which was exceptionally high. Coincidence? That's what I thought.

Sure, I've been known to accidentally use a daily power that's already seen the light of battle. And, sure, sometimes I *may* have been aware of this mistake but pretended to forget. (Got to keep your DM's senses sharp!) But sometimes I honestly don't remember to mark every maneuver off on my character sheet, and by the time the next session comes along, that memory is filled ten times over with much more meaningful data . . . like the name of the paint color at my newly remodeled neighborhood coffee shop (Intellectual Gray) or the six-ingredient coleslaw recipe my coworker told me about that I swear was so easy I didn't need to write it down (I know cabbage was involved). If your DM doesn't write this stuff down either, it's basically your memory vs. his memory. Who's to judge?

Well, funny you should ask. That's where I would come in. I've been exposed to a lot of football lately. It's what happens when you live in a one-bedroom condo with a fanatic and the only other TV in your place doesn't have cable. I've picked up some things that I think would make great additions to D&D. In the case of the he said/she said that I experience every Wednesday, I would throw a flag on the playmat and send that play for official review. I would then await the ruling. . . .

In the case of Chris Lindsay, upright Dungeon Master, D&D player for nearly three decades, father of four teenagers, revered throughout the hallowed halls of Wizards of the Coast

Vs.

Shelly Mazzanoble, pugnacious player, often accused of instigating, so challenged in the short-term memory department she has often been seen walking around the halls of Wizards of the Coast with a Tupperware container filled with green beans wondering why she was headed to the kitchen

The Dungeon Master's ruling is upheld . . . Shelly used her shield in the previous encounter.

See? I can be objective.

However, when it comes down to the DM rolling an 18 on his attack, and the PC having an 18 AC, the tie will go to the player. You should probably know that up front.

That should be enough to get my interviews started. I should probably polish up my portfolio and iron my penalty flags. I feel confident I can leave my Player-in-Chief duties in good hands. Now go on, Good Players-in-Chiefs. Give R&D the what-for and help create the D&D of tomorrow.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble has some meaningless trivia for you. Her first book, *Confessions of a Part-Time Sorceress*, was the first product to bear the 4E D&D logo. Neat!

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